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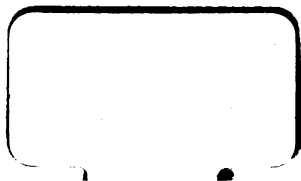
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MILLY DARRELL

And other Tales

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'
ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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HUGH DAMER'S LAST LEGER

(Continued)



CHAPTER III.

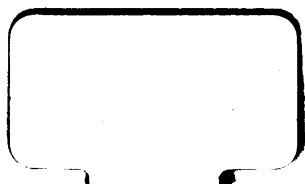
'Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.'

I WAS curious to see Miss Dashwood after what Hugh had told me, and was really concerned about my friend's difficulties. The book for the Leger did not inspire me with much hope, for I had a rooted abhorrence of the Turf. But I did hope something from Damer's attachment to Miss Dashwood, and I thought my friend's fortunes might be mended by such a marriage, without derogation to his honour. If the lady had wealth, Hugh had at least a good old name wherewith to endow her, and a position in the county which must needs be a considerable elevation for the manufacturer's daughter. It did not seem to me that the alliance would be an unequal one.

I was on the terrace, in front of the house, when the Dashwoods arrived at noon the next day, and I saw the young lady alight from her carriage. She



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'You really like Churleigh, then, Mr. Dashwood?' said Hugh, smiling a little at the manufacturer's enthusiasm, but not with a joyous smile.

'Like it! I should think I do indeed. If there were only such a place as this in the market, Dedham Park would soon be to let on lease.'

'You may have Churleigh itself, if you like,' Hugh said with an indifferent air. 'A place nearer London would suit me much better. I should scarcely care to sell the old house to a stranger, but to a friend it's a different thing.'

'What, Mr. Damer!' Laura Dashwood exclaimed wonderingly; 'you would really sell a house that has been in your family so long?'

'Why not, Miss Dashwood, if this particular member of my family doesn't happen to want it?'

'Are you in earnest, Mr. Damer?' asked George Dashwood.

'Entirely so.'

'And you will sell the place as it stands—pictures and old oak cabinets, tapestries and hangings complete?'

'As it stands; with every stick and every rag.'

He sighed, and his face darkened for a moment. Perhaps he was thinking that among those 'rags'

there were draperies which his mother's hands had embellished.

'Well, sir,' said the manufacturer, with an air of undisguised elation, 'I can only say that, when you have quite made up your mind to sell, you have but to name your price, and George Dashwood is your purchaser. I don't think there'll be much bargaining between us.'

I asked Hugh afterwards what made him talk of selling Churleigh.

'Why, you see, dear boy, if things go against me in the Leger week, I should have to part with the old place, and to do it quickly, in order to meet my engagements; so I thought it would be wise to take advantage of Dashwood's fancy. Besides, if Churleigh must go, I would rather sell it to him than to any one else. There'd be a kind of mournful pleasure in fancying Laura happy in the home of my childhood—happy with a husband perhaps, and a brood of children. I can fancy her walking in the dear old gardens, or sitting under the cedar yonder, with the little ones at her knees; while I am a lonely battered exile, fighting the battle of life somewhere beyond the sea. It's hard, isn't it, Fred? But it isn't inevitable yet. Who knows that the Leger won't bring

me a small fortune? No man's ill luck can go on for ever, and I've been losing steadily for the last two years.'

'I wish you had something better than the Turf to trust to for your deliverance, Hugh,' I said. 'I wish you would confide in Miss Dashwood's love and her father's generosity. He seems to me a man capable of taking a liberal view of things.'

He shook his head gloomily.

'No, Fred; it isn't possible for a Damer to become a dependent upon his wife.'

After this I heard no more of my friend's troubles for some time. He gave himself up utterly to the delight of Laura Dashwood's society, and seemed to enjoy life with a reckless, boisterous kind of happiness in that brief ten days of bright autumnal weather — a season in which there still remained much of the warmth and glory of summer.

Churleigh was a very pleasant house to stay in: the servants numerous and well trained; the cool shadowy gardens delicious at all times; the billiard and smoking rooms the perfection of comfort; and the old-world air of the place a perpetual soothing influence, which gave a vague indescribable charm to everything. But for me there was a sadness brood-

ing over all things, and I could not but remember how speedily this fair heritage might pass into the keeping of a stranger.

Many times during those gay idle days, for every one of which some new pleasure was devised by the master of Churleigh, I saw a cloud upon Hugh Damer's brow; but it was only a transient shadow, and however gloomy his thoughts may have been in those fitful moments of care, Laura Dashwood had the power to chase the dark shadow from the face I knew so well. Hugh's high spirits were noticed and admired by every one. It was impossible not to enjoy life in his company, people said; his gaiety was infectious.

'That fellow can never have known a care in his life,' one of his friends remarked to me; 'and yet I never knew a man drop his money more persistently than he did last year. But then, you see, the fellow is so confoundedly rich.'

We had picnics and water-parties; carpet-dances night after night in the long low drawing-room, with the six French windows set wide open, and the scent of the flowers and all the cool dewy odours of the night wafted in upon us as we danced. We had moonlit waltzes on the lawn sometimes, when it was very

pleasant to see Miss Dashwood's aerial form revolving in the strong grasp of Hugh Damer's powerful arm, and to hear her musical laughter ring out upon the still night air. What a delicious life, if it could have gone on for ever!

'Yes, Fred, if it could only go on for ever,' Hugh said to me on the night before the first race-day, as we stood together on the deserted lawn, where we had been dancing till after midnight, while the servants were extinguishing the lights in the drawing-room one by one. 'But to-morrow will see the beginning of the end, I daresay, unless my luck changes. There was a time when I thought it must change—that fortune must take a sudden turn in my favour. But somehow, as the hour draws near, I have a feeling that my fate is fixed, that there's no such thing as a turn of the tide for me, that the river of life can only drift me one way—steadily down to the dark sea of ruin!'

'That's all nonsense, old fellow,' I answered cheerily. 'Mind you, I am the last of men to hope much from the fortune of the Turf; but still there is no reason why you should not be a winner for once in a way.'

'No reason, perhaps, Fred; but I have a rooted

conviction that my ill luck will pursue me to the last. I have been too happy in that sweet girl's society — madly, recklessly happy. O God, old friend, where shall I be in a week's time ?

His tone went to my heart. I could see his face in the 'moonlight deadly pale, and the lips working convulsively.

'Let the worst come to the worst, Hugh, you will face misfortune like a man, I am sure of that.'

'Face it like a man ! That means to drag on the remnant of one's days somehow ; to turn adventurer and live by one's wits ; or to descend to gentlemanly beggary, and live upon one's friends. Of course it is unmanly to blow out one's brains and make a clean finish of it ; and yet that's the most convenient end for one's self and society.'

'For God's sake, Hugh Damer, don't let me hear you talk like that !'

'It's wicked, I suppose. But then, you see, the whole course of my life has been wicked. If my mother could have known what that life was to be when she nursed me through my childish illnesses, and prayed all night long for the passing of the danger, don't you think that she would rather I had died in

her arms, a child, innocent, untarnished, than that I should live to be what I am ?

‘It is never too late to mend, Hugh. With such a wife as Miss Dashwood, you might become as good a man as your mother ever hoped you might be, in her fondest dreams of your future.’

‘I might, I might, with such a wife. Yes, Fred ; but that is too bright a fate for me. I had my chance and lost it. If I had known Laura Dashwood sooner, perhaps — but it’s the idlest folly to talk of what might have been ; and to-morrow “makes me or unmakes me quite.” Come, light up another regalia, Fred, and we’ll have no more of this dreary talk.’

CHAPTER IV.

' Fill the can, and fill the cup :
All the windy ways of men
Are but dust that rises up,
And is lightly laid again.'

WE went to the races in great style, Hugh Damer driving a drag, with the majority of his masculine guests on the roof, and a merry party of ladies inside, Mr. Dashwood travelling in his handsome barouche with Laura, the county matron, and one of her daughters—Laura a vision of loveliness, in some cloudy costume of mauve and white, under a big white silk umbrella; and the rest of the Churleigh party in a roomy omnibus, in which the servants were wont to be driven to church on wet Sundays. Arrived on the course, Hugh posted all three vehicles in an admirable position for seeing the race, and then speedily disappeared with the Squire and a good many of his friends. I, to whom the things of the Turf were utterly indifferent, remained with the ladies, but was

not the less anxious for him whose fortune depended so much on the hazards of the day.

I knew nothing of Damer's engagements — what horses he had backed, or how the numerous events of the day were likely to affect him ; but I heard from several quarters that the running was of an unexpected character, calculated to cause disappointment to the majority of the gentlemen speculators.

Hugh came to us several times in the course of the day, and, though he talked and laughed with Miss Dashwood and the rest, and might have seemed to a casual observer to be in excellent spirits, I saw that in his face which boded ill for the issue of the day. He drank a great deal of brandy and soda — drank with a feverish eagerness ; but I noticed that he ate nothing all through the day. I secured the box-seat for the return journey, anxious to know the worst, and at once.

‘ Well, Hugh ? ’ I asked in a low voice, when we were clear of the crowd and bowling rapidly along a smooth high road bordered with noble old timber.

‘ Well, Fred, I told you about that rooted conviction of mine. It was pretty correct, that’s all.’

‘ Then the day has been a bad one ? ’

‘ About as bad as it could be.’

'But there's to-morrow,' I said, with a faint attempt at hopefulness.

'Yes; and my luck will be about the same to-morrow that it has been to-day, I have no doubt. Did you ever see anything like the running to-day? No man can stand against such a collapse as that. Ptarmigan won the Chester as easily as these four bays of mine could win a race against a costermonger's donkey, and to-day he let himself be passed by a beggarly plater. If I didn't know the character of his stable, I could swear the brute had been got at.'

'Was the day good for the ring or the public?'

'O, the bookmen got the best of it, of course. None of the favourites won.'

'Were you unfortunate in everything?' I asked.

'Yes, everything.'

'That's hard lines, old fellow.'

'You don't know the trouble it cost me to make my book, Fred. It was a great combination which *might* have made my fortune; the last venture of a desperate man, who wanted to redeem all by one great *coup*. But I have no farther faith in it now. The campaign has opened with defeat. To-day has been my Moscow; to-morrow will be Waterloo.'

I tried to cheer him in a few low words. I don't think there was anything but gloom and bitterness in his mind; but he had that natural pride which shrinks from the revelation of misfortune. He roused himself with an effort, and talked loudly and cheerily all the way home; and I doubt if any one upon the drag except myself suspected that he had been a heavy loser by that day's work.

And by and by, at the composite meal, half dinner and half supper, which awaited us at Churleigh—a sumptuous banquet in its way, where lobsters and raised pies, winged creatures of all kinds, and hot-house fruits of gorgeous colouring were heaped upon the table with the picturesque profusion of the feast in Paul Veronese's famous picture of the 'Marriage in Cana of Galilee,' and at which the men drank deep of Badminton and Moselle cup from huge silver tankards of the Georgian era, while the ladies sipped tea and coffee or trifled with a glass of Cliquot—the gayest at the long oak table was the host, who led every peal of laughter, and said the best things that were uttered that night. We sat long and late, the ladies only retiring at midnight, Miss Dashwood declaring, as she bade her host good night, that she had never in her life spent so delightful a day. 'I was always

fond of races,' she said, with a deprecating air,—'I suppose it is a pernicious taste that is natural to a Yorkshire woman,—but I never enjoyed anything as much as the racing to-day.'

✓ 'I hope it is not the last by a great many that you will spend at Churleigh Wood,' Hugh said, with a strange smile.

Late as it was when our party broke up that night, Hugh Damer and Mr. Dashwood were closeted together in the library for a full hour after the rest had gone to their rooms. I heard their voices as they wished each other good-night on the stairs, and heard my friend's step as he walked slowly and heavily along the corridor leading to his own quarters. It was not like his accustomed footfall, and I knew that interview in the library must have been an unpleasant one.

'You've sold Churleigh Wood, Hugh,' I said to him, as we drove to the races next day.

'Yes, old fellow, the deed is done. The old place is gone from me for ever and ever. There is no time to lose. I may want the money before the week is out. The manufacturer was very liberal; has paid me a splendid price for his fancy; and the place is

gone—and Laura's children will play under the oaks I used to climb fifteen years ago.'

'God grant they may be your children as well as Laura's,' I said. 'I cannot bear to think your birth-place is quite gone from you.'

'Rather hard lines, wasn't it? But a man must reap what he has sown, Fred, and I have scattered the evil seed with a free hand. I don't deserve anything better.'

The next day was the Leger. That clean, airy little town, which is, in its normal condition, one of the quietest and dullest in England, brimmed over with human life, and rang loud with the buzz and clamour of innumerable tongues. This great autumnal meeting is the saturnalia of the North, and, looking at it from the outside, a pleasant festival enough; but I contemplated that noisy gathering with a jaundiced eye, and my heart sickened as I thought how the day might end for Hugh Damer.

I was too anxious about my friend's fortunes to remain with the ladies to-day: though Laura Dashwood, in a fresh toilette of pale blue and a dainty bonnet that was all forget-me-nots—as if that floral reminder were needed! who could forget Laura, once having known her?—was lovely and fascinating

enough to have held any man, not bitten by the scorpion of the Turf, bound like a slave to the wheel of her barouche. I was very uneasy about my friend, and followed him everywhere, with the air of a meek Pylades dancing attendance on a very fiery Orestes—into the ring, into the paddock, and out upon the pleasant stretch of turf on the other side of the course to see the horses take their show-off canter.

‘There she goes,’ he cried: ‘Baron Von Bourse’s Jezebel—the bay yonder with the small head—green body and pink sleeves. I wonder how many men’s hearts she carries at her hoofs? My future depends on her, Norris. I saw her win the Guineas. I’d put every sixpence I could stand upon Pasteboard—the bony gray that had been winning everything in the autumn—and she flew by him like a bird. Look at her, old boy! By Jove, she’s a clipper. Isn’t it a graceful action? There was a confounded lot of rain last night, and the ground’s heavier than I like to see it. But I think she must win—there’s nothing that can touch her, to my mind.’

‘Not Conjuror, your great Yorkshire horse?’

‘Conjuror is as fat as a pig.’

‘There’s a brute yonder—with the jockey in black

and crimson—that I hardly like the look of, Hugh,' I said doubtfully. 'He's got a splendid stride. See what a lot of ground he covers.'

'That!' cried Hugh contemptuously; 'a raw-boned beast that never won a race in his life, unless it was some pettifogging plate at the Curragh.'

We posted ourselves about a quarter of a mile from the stand, just outside the phalanx of carriages, drags, wagonettes, barouches, family omnibuses, landaus, Whitechapel carts, and the rest; posted ourselves at a point from which we could get a very fair view of the finish—Hugh standing on an old cask, looming gigantic above the rails; I just in front of his knees. There was a cold dead weight at my breast as the flag dropped, and the hoarse clamorous cry arose—

'They're off!'

The start was beautiful. For the first quarter of a mile you might have covered the field with a tablecloth. Then some obscure animal got away, and began to make the running. Then half-a-dozen more crept after him. Then the favourite, Jezebel, shot forward to the front, and took a lead which she held steadily till she was within something less than half a mile of the judge's chair.

'She wins!' roared that mighty chorus; 'the mare wins!'

Hugh Damer clapped his hand on my shoulder—such a muscular grip, it felt like a hand in an iron glove.

'God bless her!' he cried—not impiously, I hope; 'she has saved Churleigh.'

Alas! too soon had they cheered the victor. That raw-boned plater of which Damer had spoken so scornfully came tearing over the heavy ground, with a thud upon the turf that was like distant thunder, and gained on the graceful Jezebel. There was cart-horse blood in him, I believe. Nothing thorough-bred could have pounded over the clay like that.

I looked up at Damer. O God, what a white agonised face I saw!—fixed and rigid, with the eyes glaring at the winner.

'Good-bye, Churleigh,' he cried, with a choking sound, that was half laugh, half sob. 'That brute has ridden away with my birthplace and my wife. The ring has got the day, old fellow. There'll be boasting and rejoicing in the tents of Keedah to-night. They've been skinning the lamb all through this meeting. Come along, old chap. Let's go back to the women and hear their pretty baby-talk about

it's being such a splendid race—"and, O, please, which is the Leger, Mr. Damer? is it an epergne or a tankard, and may we go and see it?"'

He put his arm in mine and dragged me off, after he had given that feeble cask a kick that sent it spinning into space. This hollow-hearted gaiety which he put on seemed to me very piteous. I think I would rather have seen him cast himself prone upon the turf and weep aloud.

On this particular night I had again contrived to secure the seat beside him as we drove home, and once more, and in the same spot, I asked him the question I had asked at the end of the first day,

'Well, Hugh?'

'It's all over, dear boy. I am done for.'

'Quite ruined, Hugh?'

'Past all possibility of redemption.'

'It can't surely be so bad as that,' I said; 'let me help you. I am better off than you give me credit for being, I dare say. I can do something at the worst.'

'No, no, my dear fellow. Anything you lent me would only be a drop in the ocean. It's like you to make the offer, but it would be letting you in for a loss without doing me any good. I must make

the best settlement I can with my creditors, and then—'

He paused, and I waited in vain for the end of that sentence.

'And then what, Hugh?' I asked anxiously.

'Who knows? Who knows what becomes of all the men who go to the dogs? They go across the seas somewhere, I suppose, and drop out of the knowledge of the circle they have lived in; or they hold horses—since Will Shakespeare's time it's the orthodox thing for a man who's down in his luck to hold horses. Anything is better than the chance of being met in Oxford-street by an old acquaintance, out at elbows and with boots that are themselves a history.'

'Then you mean that you will emigrate?'

'I mean nothing at present—except to make the best settlement of my debts that I can.'

'Hugh Damer, give me your honour as a gentleman that you will do nothing rash.'

'Rash! you mean that I mustn't make a sudden end of a worthless life. Don't be afraid, Fred; men have a weak way of clinging to existence, let it be ever so troublesome. Life is a habit, you see, and sometimes a very bad habit, but it's not one of which

a man can easily cure himself. I shall go on living, depend upon it, somehow.'

'And remember, Hugh, how many men have to face the world without a sixpence—to trust in their own talents alone for success. And you have powers so much above the ruck. You are young enough to begin life again.'

'At thirty, Fred, and after living at the rate I have lived?' I doubt it. But don't waste any thought upon my future, dear boy—I'm not worth it.'

My heart bled for him as we drove up the long avenue leading to Churleigh, and I saw the old Tudor mansion, with its many-shaped windows flashing brightness upon the autumn night. Within there was the glow and warmth of fires, welcome even at this early season; the flash and glitter of rare old glass and silver on the long dining-table; and withal that air of mingled repose and grandeur only to be found to perfection in an old house, where every object has the grace and charm of an age that has gone by.

The Dashwoods, and all the rest of the guests, were to leave next day, but at Hugh's earnest request the manufacturer consented to stay till the following Monday morning.

'Let us have one quiet Sunday together,' my

poor friend pleaded, glancing from George Dashwood to his daughter, who stood a little way apart, watching him, with parted, faintly-tremulous lips, and a somewhat richer bloom than usual on her cheeks; 'just one quiet Sunday. You see, the house has been so full of people that I have really been scarcely able to enjoy your society—and we are something more than ordinary acquaintances; we are friends, are we not? and I should like for us to have just one quiet day together.'

'Friends! yes, I should think we are,' the manufacturer answered heartily; 'and I hope we shall pass many days together. However, as you make such a point of Sunday, why, we'll stay. You don't mind, do you, Laura?' She shook her head, with a gracious smile, and a still deeper blush, and then bent down to caress a favourite pointer of Hugh's.

'I shall be glad to have a walk round the grounds and a little serious talk with you, Damer,' her father went on. 'There are some alterations I think of making, and I should like your opinion about them.'

'Alterations!' cried Laura; 'surely you wouldn't change anything where all is so perfect?'

Hugh gave her a grateful look—only one brief glance, but it expressed a great deal, I thought.

CHAPTER V.

‘Life’s joy for us a moment lingers,
And death seems in the word farewell.’

I TRIED to get away on Saturday, thinking that my friend would like to be quite alone with the Dashwoods, but it was no use; Hugh was determined that I should stay to the last. So I stayed, and I believe I was of some value in engrossing the manufacturer’s society, and listening patiently to a good deal of talk about trade-unionism and the manner in which commercial England was digging her own grave, while Hugh and Laura strolled side by side among the shady paths of the shrubberies, and on the broad sunny walk beside the moat, making a poor pretence of being intensely interested in the fish that glanced to and fro under the dark still water, or in the showy groups of geraniums on the sloping bank.

I knew that they were happy—that it was a halcyon Sabbath for Hugh Damer, though he was for-

bidden to speak the words that must have risen so often to his lips.

We went to the old church, just beyond the gates of Churleigh Wood, in the morning ; and Laura sat under the white marble tablet that recorded the virtues of Hugh Damer's dead mother, while all about and around us were effigies of departed and heroic Damers, who had worn sword or gown in the good days that were gone.

That peaceful Sunday came to a close at last, and I thought at nightfall that there was a look of sadness, and even disappointment, in Laura's expressive face. Perhaps she had expected something more from Hugh Damer than those airy nothings, those graceful compliments, which had been his tribute to her that day.

The Dashwoods left very early next morning, and I, who was to go away half an hour later, was present at their departure. I saw a sad wistful look in Laura's face as she wished my friend good-bye.

'There shall be no change in this place that *I* can help, Mr. Damer,' she said gently ; 'be sure of that.'

'You are an angel of kindness, Miss Dashwood, and I am almost happy that my old home should pass into your hands.'

‘And yet it was a strange caprice to sell it,’ she said wonderingly.

‘A caprice—yes ; but you see it is the nature of men to be fickle.’

‘And I suppose you are like the rest of your species,’ she answered, with a faint sigh. ‘There are some family portraits, by the by, that you will wish to keep, of course,’ she added shyly. ‘They shall be sent to you when you are settled.’

‘You are all goodness. I will ask for them—when I am settled.’

‘Come, Laura,’ cried Mr. Dashwood, ‘are you going to keep Damer there for ever with your chatter? Remember that I have an appointment at Dedham at two. Good-bye, Damer ; be sure that this place will always be your home whenever you like to come to it.’

‘A thousand thanks—good-bye. Good-bye, Miss Dashwood.’

And so those two parted, with not so much as a farewell pressure of the hands to betray Hugh Damer’s love.

‘God bless her !’ he said softly, after he had stood for some minutes silently watching the carriage as it drove along the broad road that circled the gardens,

and disappeared in the avenue leading to the gates. 'God bless her fair young face! She's the sweetest girl that ever I looked upon; and I think she could have loved me, if I had been free to ask for her love.'

'Think she could have loved you?' I echoed indignantly; 'why, I know that she loves you, and that you have almost broken her innocent heart by not speaking out like a man. If you had only made a clean breast of it yesterday, when you and she were meandering about the gardens in an obvious state of mutual spooniness, you might have had everything comfortably settled with old Dashwood this morning.'

'No, Fred, it's impossible—I am a beggar.'

I had no time to argue the case just then; the dog-cart was waiting to drive me to Doncaster in time for the up-train. I begged Hugh to come straight to me when he came to London, which I expected him to do speedily; to make my quarters his home whenever he was in town; and to trust me fully, in honour of our friendship, which meant nothing if it did not mean a real confidence in each other. He promised to do this, shook my hands heartily, and hurried me off to the dog-cart. My last backward glance showed me the tall figure standing alone upon the broad gravel

path by the moat, in the beloved home which was his no longer.

He never came to me ; my anxious and laborious inquiries about him resulted only in the vaguest possible information. No one, either in London or at Churleigh Wood, could give me any definite account of his whereabouts. There was a general impression that he had gone abroad, but no one could say where. He had settled his affairs in a speedy but satisfactory manner, paid all his racing debts in full and some other creditors, made a composition with others, and so on ; and had left Churleigh quietly one October morning, with a single portmanteau, and with a scrubby Scotch terrier called Nailbrush, which had been wont to sleep in an old hat box in his dressing-room, for his only companion and attendant, bound none knew whither. Every one spoke well of him and wished him well, but no one could set my mind at ease as to his fate.

I remembered that wild talk of his about making an easy end of all his difficulties with a pistol, and for a long time I was haunted by a dreadful fear. I watched the newspapers for accounts of nameless suicides ; I visited dead-houses, to look upon hapless creatures found drowned, and unclaimed by the liv-

ing; I put myself in communication with the police. Happily nothing came of all this, and I began to hope that Hugh Damer had indeed gone to seek his fortunes in a newer and wider world.

CHAPTER VI.

‘And now those vivid hours are gone.

Like mine own life to me thou art,

Where Past and Present, wound in one,

Do make a garland for the heart.’

FIVE years went by, and I had heard nothing of Damer. Every autumn I had made a point of spending a week or a fortnight at the pretty rustic village near the gates of Churleigh Wood. Every year I fancied that I should obtain some tidings of my friend ; every year I became more attached to the place. I had excellent lodgings in the pretty picturesque abode of a farmer's widow, half cottage, half villa, and my annual visit had become quite an institution.

I had grown very intimate with the Dashwoods in the course of these yearly holidays, and the manufacturer had given me many hospitable invitations to make Churleigh my head-quarters. This I did not care to do. The place was too closely associated with my lost friend for it to seem natural to me as a home

without him. But it was impossible altogether to resist Mr. Dashwood's friendly advances, and little by little I became a frequent visitor at the noble old house. Laura was still unmarried; no children's voices had yet awakened the echoes of the sombre oak-panelled galleries; Hugh's fancy picture of the fair young mother sitting under the cedar with her babies round her had not been realised. She was no less lovely than when I first beheld her as Hugh Damer's guest, but her beauty had a pensive shadow upon it in these latter days, I fancied; and I wondered whether she still cherished the memory of him who had once been master of Churleigh Wood. Her father told me that she had rejected many suitors, and declined more than one eligible alliance.

'It's rather hard upon me, you see,' Mr. Dashwood said plaintively, 'for I am getting old and shaky, and I should like to see my little girl married to an honest man, and established in a good position, before I go off the hooks. She'll have a good bit of money when I'm gone, and a young woman with money is a fair mark for every adventurer.'

'I think Miss Dashwood is too wise to become the prey of an adventurer,' I replied; 'her pure mind would never mistake pinchbeck for gold.'

'Yes, she is a good girl,' the father answered, with a sigh; 'but I should like to see her married.'

'To a man of equal fortune to her own, I suppose?' I said, anxious to find out how the land might have lain for my friend Damer, had he made Miss Dashwood an offer.

'Well, yes,' the manufacturer answered meditatively. 'You see, if a man is poor, it's difficult to get rid of the notion that he's more or less of a fortune-hunter. I should like my daughter to marry a man whose means placed him beyond that suspicion.'

'Ah!' I thought. 'Then there would have been no chance for Damer.'

When I went to Churleigh Wood next autumn, there was no cheery loud-voiced host to bid me welcome. George Dashwood lay in a newly-built vault near the resting-place of the Damers, and a handsome monument in the old church bore the record of his homely virtues. He had been dead nearly a year—carried off suddenly, in full health and vigour, as it seemed, by a stroke of apoplexy.

Miss Dashwood had been abroad for the greater part of the time since her father's death, the woman at the lodge told me; but she was at Churleigh now,

fondly welcomed by the poor of the district, to whom she had ever been a generous friend. She was more devoted to them, even, than of old, the woman told me, seeing no company, and giving the best part of her life to works of charity and benevolence.

I called upon her on the day after my arrival, and found her calm and serenely lovely in her sombre mourning robes. She had a widowed aunt living with her, a sister of Mr. Dashwood's; a homely matron, who had been a small farmer's wife, and whose existence had been spent in the quiet atmosphere of a rural homestead; an honest, kindly soul, who spoke a broad Yorkshire *patois* that was almost like a foreign language to me, and to whom Laura seemed warmly attached.

We talked much of her dead father, and my hearty praises of him seemed to touch Miss Dashwood keenly.

'You will dine with us before you leave the village, I hope, Mr. Norris,' she said, when I was taking my departure. 'We are only two solitary women, and cannot offer you a very lively evening, but I know you are fond of the old house.'

I accepted the invitation, and dined at Churleigh on the following evening. The curate of the parish, a rather insipid young man, with ritualistic proclivi-

ties, had been asked to meet me. We were a very quiet party of four, but there was no dulness for me in that tranquil evening. There was a tender charm in Laura Dashwood's society which I had never found in that of any other woman, and the refinement of all her surroundings seemed more marked now that her father's somewhat *bourgeoise* figure was missing from the picture.

We dined in the cedar parlour, and adjourned for our dessert to the library—a noble old room of octagonal shape, large and lofty, with four wide high windows opening upon a flower-garden, which had always been sacred to the *châtelaines* of Churleigh. It was a sultry evening, and the four windows were all open; the little lawn beyond them steeped in a tender silvery moonlight, the semi-circle of trees that shut us in from the outer world rising dark and high against a cloudless heaven.

On such an evening one has a natural aversion from artificial light, so, by general desire, there was only one lamp lighted in the library, a moderator, with a large opaque globe and a dark-green velvet shade, which stood on an oaken table in a remote corner of the room.

Miss Dashwood officiated by and by with her own

fair hands at a pretty little oval tea-table by one of the open windows, and we drank our fragrant orange-pekoë out of old egg-shell china teacups without handles, in a very homelike and friendly fashion. After tea Mrs. Pollard, the farmer's widow, retired to a shady corner, where, I think, she indulged in placid slumber; while the curate withdrew to the lamp-lit table, and amused himself turning over a portfolio of photographs collected by Laura during her late travels.

Miss Dashwood and I were thus left alone at our open window. She was seated in a meditative attitude, looking dreamily out at the moon-lit lawn, and for some time I could see that she bore her part in our conversation in a half-mechanical manner, and that her thoughts were very far away. This became so obvious to me after a little while, that I left off talking altogether at last, and we sat in silence, both of us looking out at that tranquil garden, so fair in the solemn hush of the warm September night.

'Do you know what anniversary this is?' she asked me by and by, in a sudden way that almost startled me.

'An anniversary?'

'Yes, the fifteenth—the date of the St. Leger which we saw run with your friend Mr. Damer. You—you have not heard of him lately, I suppose?' she asked timidly. I doubt whether in the broad light of day she would have found courage to ask me that question. Certainly she had never asked it so directly before.

'I have had no tidings whatever of or from him in all the five years that have gone by since that day.'

'Do you think he is dead?' she asked, her voice trembling a little.

'Well, no; I can't bring myself to believe that. You know the proverb about bad news. I think, if anything had happened to cut short his career, I should have heard of it somehow. I know he had almost made up his mind to emigrate—try his luck in the Colonies, and so on.'

'I fear he was quite ruined when he sold papa this place.'

'Yes, it was all over with him when he brought his mind to *that* sacrifice.'

'And I thought him hard-hearted for parting with his birthplace. How unjust I was!'

'Indeed, Miss Dashwood? I do not believe you were disposed to be ungenerous to him.'

'Ungenerous ! No ; he would not have found me ungenerous, if he would only have trusted me.'

Her tone was unspeakably tender as she pronounced those few last words.

'There was no one more anxious than I that he should trust you,' I said ; 'for I knew how dearly he loved you.'

'Loved me ! And you knew that ?'

'Yes. I knew that he loved you with all his heart and soul. But he was too proud to offer himself to you in his beggary.'

She made no remark upon this. I too was silent, for I knew that she was thinking of my friend ; knew, as I had known from the first, that she loved him.

Presently, with a suddenness that startled both of us, there came a shadow athwart the moonlight—the tall gaunt figure of a man ; a figure which seemed at once strange and yet familiar to me, and the sight of which set my heart throbbing violently.

He came across the moonlit lawn, and stood facing the window where we sat. Laura Dashwood rose to her feet, looking at him intently, very pale in the moonlight.

'Good evening, Miss Dashwood,' he said in a low voice, and with that quiet ease of manner which some

men would carry with them to the pillory or the block. 'Is there any welcome at Churleigh Wood for a wanderer and an outcast?'

'Mr. Damer!' she cried, and I could hear the rapture in the faint yet eager cry.

'Hugh! dear old Hugh!' I shouted, clasping his hands in mine. How thin and wasted the once muscular fingers felt as I grasped them!

'Why, what is this, dear boy? you are as pale as a ghost!' I exclaimed, as Hugh Damer dropped heavily into a chair.

'I have been very ill on the passage home—intermittent fever, or something of that kind. There was no doctor on board ship, but the skipper physicked me in a rough-and-ready fashion of his own, and at one time he gave me little hope that I should ever see the old country again. However, I pulled through somehow. I have rather a strong will, you know, Fred, and I grappled with grim death hand to hand. I wanted so to come home.'

'After five years, Hugh,' I said. 'Why not in all those five years?'

'I had a purpose to accomplish, and I waited till it was accomplished. When that was done, the home sickness grew upon me like a kind of madness. I

overworked myself, perhaps, a little towards the end of my exile ; I was so eager to return, to look upon Churleigh Wood once more. But I had not been on board the vessel three days before I was struck down with this wretched fever ; and till within a week of our landing I was not able to drag myself on deck. We only reached Liverpool this afternoon, and I have pushed across-country as fast as the railways would let me, wasting most wearisome intervals at out-of-the-way junctions, and altogether enduring a prolonged trial of human patience. Thank God, I am here at last ! Miss Dashwood — Laura — there was something I would have given the world to say to you on that last happy Sunday we spent in this house — something I dared not tell you then. I have come from the other side of the world to say it now.'

When this secret was told, I know not ; but I know that we finished the evening very pleasantly, weak as Hugh Damer still was. He went home to share my lodgings with me, and my landlady and I nursed him between us, and made a strong man of him in a very short time. This being done, I was fain to return to the busy world, and leave my old friend in possession of my quarters.

Two months afterwards, in the gray misty No-

vember, there was a quiet wedding in the old church amongst the effigies of departed Damers, and the fair young mistress of Churleigh Wood took the name of its old masters.

'Well, darling,' Hugh said to his bride, as they stood in the old gothic porch waiting for the carriage that was to convey them on the first stage of their honeymoon journey, 'I suppose you think you have married a pauper?'

'I know that I have married the only man I ever loved, Hugh,' she answered, in her low tender voice, 'and that is all I have ever thought of.'

'Then I am happy to tell you that he is also one of the richest men in Sydney, my pet,' Hugh answered, smiling down upon the fair face. 'I went away to redeem my fortune and return to you, Laura, or to remain away for ever. There were no half measures for me. I was a speculator, and a desperate one—for my case was desperate—but an honest one always, dear; and fortune favoured me. I used to fancy that your influence protected and succoured me. There seemed a kind of magic in my success, and the day came at last when I won the great prize, and was master of a fortune that I might fairly ask you to share. Only it was pleasant for me to defer telling

you this till you had taken me for better, for worse, sweet one, and to know that you would have taken me penniless.'

What need I tell after this? When the happy sound of wedding bells rings out upon the air, one can generally guess the end of the story; although there are those who do come to grief, and ruin worse than death, after marriage.

Those two of whom I have written were very happy; no cloud came athwart their sunshine; and I have seen Laura sitting under the big cedar, with her children round her, and Hugh Damer lying at her feet among his babies—not a lonely exile, wandering far away broken-hearted, as he had fancied himself doomed to wander when he made the picture.

Churleigh opens its hospitable door to me every autumn. The old master of the Glendown Hunt has gone to that quiet rest from which even the deep-mouthed voices of his favourites are not loud enough to waken him, and Hugh has been elected, by the popular voice of the neighbourhood, into that honourable position. He hunts about six times a week; gives hunting breakfasts that are banquets of an almost Gargantuan character, and I go down for a run

with him now and then, with my portmanteau stuffed full of briefs—not one of which I look at during my holiday.

Often, on autumnal evenings, pacing up and down by the moat, enjoying the social weed in a kind of half silence that is pleasanter than talk, we drop out a word or two about that unforgotten Leger.

‘It was much better to win the race by your own pluck and industry, than by the swiftness of Jezebel’s heels, wasn’t it, Hugh?’ I said once.

‘Well, I don’t know, old fellow,’ he answered in his careless way. ‘I lost five years of paradise, and had to work like a galley-slave among our friends in the Antipodes. But I suppose it makes a better moral.’

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

CHAPTER I.

DEVERILL'S WOOING.

It was a wild and reckless court to which George, Lord Deverill, brought his fair young wife, in those early days after the Restoration, when all the pleasure-lovers and volatile spirits of England were recompensing themselves for the dreary interregnum in which Puritanism had reigned supreme throughout the length and breadth of the land. A reckless and dissipated court, and a reckless and dissipated monarch, centre of one unchangingly vicious circle of flatterers and parasites; good-natured enough in the main, no doubt, even to the selling of Dunkirk to oblige his friends on the other side of the Channel; generous and affectionate to his mistresses and favourites; not given to cruelty in an active manner, yet willing that his enemies should pay the price of their treason; altogether an easy-going ruler, across whose flowery path the darker memory of his father's martyrdom seldom cast a shadow; above all, a most

popular sovereign, most of all in that court region where the brilliant pageantry of his life made a perpetual festival.

To such a court George Deverill, master of Deverill Castle—a grim and stony gothic pile, half fortress, half palace, in the far north—and of a most princely revenue, brought his young wife; a wild-rosebud kind of beauty, not quite twenty years of age, and nearly thirty years younger than her husband.

All the court fell in love with Lady Deverill at first sight. Even the women were enthusiastic about her beauty. It was scarcely a dangerous kind of loveliness. The poor child's too evident timidity forbade her ever becoming a rival to those bolder dames.

'Poor little wildwood blossom,' said the court rhymesters, 'she seems oppressed by the burden of her greatness as Lady Deverill. She ought to have married a country parson, and spent her days in an atmosphere of syllabubs and new-mown hay. She is no more fit for our world than the pure light of the evening star is adapted to mingle with the garish blaze of the lamps at Whitehall.'

And who was this fair young creature, and where did she come from? people asked curiously. Their

questions were soon answered. She was the only child of Sir Talbot Treherne, a Cornish baronet of ruined fortunes, who had died three years before, in a dreary old house among the wild barren hills of that far western coast. A stanch royalist, but a bad man, said those who remembered his career. Lord Deverill and he had been fast friends in the days of their luckless master, but had parted company after the king's death; Deverill to follow his prince's fortunes abroad, Treherne to retire to his remnant of estate in Cornwall, carrying with him his motherless little girl.

When the Cornishman found himself dying, he wrote to his old friend, entreating him to take upon himself the guardianship of the orphan girl, his darling Alice, and her pitiful little fortune; and to see that she fell into the hands of no villain or adventurer, but married an honest gentleman.

'She is comely,' the father wrote; 'and you are not likely to have much trouble in finding her a husband, small as her dowry will be. I ask only that he should be an honest man. In any other case, there are convents abroad where a gentleman's daughter may find a fitting shelter. We are of the old faith, as you know, Deverill; and Alice would not be the

first of my race to abandon the turmoil and temptations of the world for the quiet shadow of the convent-wall.'

It is but too often the fate of a man, whose mode of life throws him into the society of the profligate and unprincipled, to find himself at the last with no friend of high character in whom he can repose his dying trust. Certainly George Deverill was scarcely the man to whose care a fond father would have left his only child, had the field for choice been wider. But Deverill was not a profligate; and he was, perhaps, the only man among Talbot Treherne's intimate acquaintances whose character was not tainted by the vulgar vices.

He was a stern hard man, with a dark foreign-looking face, which had once been eminently handsome, but which, growing more haughty of expression year by year under the influence of disappointed ambition, was now chiefly remarkable for sullen pride, and a latent fierceness which boded ill for any one who should offend Lord Deverill.

His lordship's feelings on receiving his old friend's letter—which, in the slow transit of those days, did not reach him until Talbot Treherne was numbered with the dead—were by no means of unalloyed de-

light. What, in the name of the evil one, was he to do with a ward not twenty years of age ; a beauty, spoilt by a weak old father ; self-willed, no doubt, and eager for a life of pleasure ? George Deverill meant to spend the greater part of his life about the court, and how was he to endure the encumbrance of a ward, who would be mistaken for his daughter most likely, and would make him seem an old man before his time ?

Yes, the father was right ; the convent would be the best place for Alice Treherne ; and if she objected to a French or a Belgian convent, why she might go and spend her days at Deverill Castle, where there was an old housekeeper, and an attenuated staff of ancient retainers, deaf and rheumatic for the most part ; and where the grass grew in the great stone quadrangle, and dark damp moss crept over the lower walls, and owls hooted at night in the ivy that covered the tall towers at each angle of the gaunt old pile.

Lord Deverill smiled at his own humorous fancies with a grim and saturnine smile, as he thought of that remote northern mansion being made the bower of youth and beauty.

It was necessary for him to act, and promptly, he

told himself, so as to get this troublesome business off his hands. So he went down to Cornwall to see the girl, and settle matters with her. The journey was long and tiresome; the weather cold and gloomy. He had some thoughts of sending his steward with a letter announcing his intentions, and empowering the man to conduct Mistress Alice either to a foreign convent or the far northern castle. But, he argued with himself, this line of conduct might seem scarcely kind; and Talbot Treherne had once been his bosom friend. Moreover, should the girl prove rebellious, and set her face against either convent or castle, the steward might be unable to manage her. Lord Deverill had no fear that she would disobey *him*; and again he smiled at his own fancies, with that peculiar smile of his. He was a man who was accustomed to be obeyed, had governed those about him from his earliest manhood by the simple force of his stern hard nature, and could but smile at the thought of opposition from this girl.

So he went to Treherne Court himself.

He went himself; and Alice neither took shelter in a foreign convent nor was doomed to the dismal solitude of Deverill Castle. George Deverill, whose heart had never been touched by a woman in all the

nine-and-forty years of his life, fell desperately in love with his dead friend's daughter before he had known her a week. He did not yield himself up weakly or easily to this foolish fancy, as he called his passion in his arguments with himself. Nay, he battled sternly with himself, and fought a hard fight before he was fain to own himself utterly beaten. But he loved her—he loved her. It all began and ended in those common words. The heart which had been colder than ice, harder than iron until now, was melted all at once, and owned this simple girl for its mistress.

What was it that had subjugated this cold stern nature? Her beauty? Scarcely that; for, lovely as she was, George Deverill had seen many women who were her equals, if not superiors, in outward charms, and who possessed finished graces of manner which she had not. Perhaps her very helplessness and timidity, her utter innocence and childishness, may have enhanced her loveliness in George Deverill's eyes. For himself, he scarcely knew what it was that he loved in her; he only knew that he did love her with a passion against which reason pleaded in vain.

Helpless and friendless though she was, and easy

as the code of gentlemanly honour was in those days, Lord Deverill was incapable of a dishonourable thought or a guilty hope. His errors were not the common errors of his time. His was a dark passionate nature, not without a rugged kind of nobility, which showed itself in his countenance at times, despite that repellent look of pride which was its ordinary expression.

He had intended to finish his business at Treherne Court in something less than a week. He stopped there a month, and at the end of that time asked Alice Treherne to be his wife.

He had scarcely any hope that she loved him. What so unlikely as that this fair flower could entwine itself about his rugged barren trunk, scathed atop by the lightnings of a life's disappointment? No, he expected little love in return for his passionate devotion, of which indeed he had given her small evidence, being of too proud a nature to reveal so much weakness. But he had watched her closely, and he told himself that she was pure-minded and affectionate, innocent and dutiful, and that she must needs make a faithful wife. He fancied that in her helplessness, in the utter blankness of her future prospects, she would scarcely reject such a position

as that he had to offer her. He counted upon this, and nothing more.

So one evening, when these two were alone together in the dreary saloon at Treherne Court, where the faded tapestries and worm-eaten furniture had a dismal look of poverty and decay, George Deverill asked Alice to be his wife. He did not say much about his love, shrinking with an aversion that was almost a physical pain from any revelation of his passion. He dwelt rather upon her own loneliness, his old friendship for her father, and the wisdom of such an union. He had prepared himself for the worst, even to see a look of dislike in the fair young face, or of scorn perhaps—scorn of his fifty years.

What was his surprise when the fair head sank gently upon his breast, the sweet face nestling close to him to hide its blushes!

‘Alice, look up; speak to me; is it yes or no?’ he said eagerly.

She did look up at him through her tears. The rosebud lips trembled, but did not speak.

‘Alice, will you be my wife?’

‘O my lord, you have made me so proud, so happy!’

‘What!’ he cried, ‘you love me, then, child?’

‘With all my heart.’

Lord Deverill looked down at the fair blushing face wonderingly, nay, with a look of scrutiny that was almost severe. He was more startled by the girl’s confession than if she had told him that she hated him. Love him—this bright young creature, in all the glory of her girlhood and beauty—love *him*, the hard man of the world, thirty years her senior! A passionate rapture stirred his heart at the thought; and yet with that deep sense of joy there mingled the shadow of doubt. Could he believe her? It seemed so unlikely—and women, ay, even the fairest and youngest, are such deceivers. All the stories of womanly treachery he had ever heard seemed to crowd into his mind at that moment. Yet he drew the girl closer to his breast, and set his lips upon the pure brow.

‘So be it, then, my sweet one,’ he said, with tenderness that seemed strange even to himself, so alien was it from the sternness of his nature. ‘Thou art mine henceforward—the fairest bride that ever brightened a man’s hearth. And thou wilt not grow weary of me, though I am so much older than thou, and am apt to seem cold and churlish even to those I love the best?’

'Weary of you!' the girl repeated, with a happy smile; 'I love you, I honour you, as I have loved and honoured none but my father. You were his chosen friend. He used to talk of you so often, that I made a picture of you in my mind—yes, and my picture was like you; only not noble enough. But how could I think that you would ever stoop to love me—you who could choose a wife from all the lovely ladies of the court, and might have won the loveliest and noblest of them?'

The tender flattery touched his heart, but he made no reply. He was still looking down at the innocent face with that anxious searching gaze of his. It was so hard for him to believe implicitly in her truth, even now. His cynical mind had been ever prone to doubt his fellow-men, and the thought of his rank and wealth came between him and his perfect trust in this girl whom he loved so passionately. Yet it was something to have won the prize upon which he had set his heart; and if George Deverill was not so happy as he should have been that night, there was at least a sense of triumph in his mind which was a fair substitute for happiness.

Dame Margery Dormer, a widow lady of reduced fortunes, who had been Sir Talbot's housekeeper for

the last fifteen years, and had served as a kind of duenna for Alice, heard of her young mistress's betrothal with much satisfaction, more especially as Lord Deverill told her that she need have no anxiety about her own future. She might end her days at Treherne Court, and consider herself in all essentials mistress of that Cornish mansion, which he and his wife were not likely to visit very often.

'I daresay Alice would like to have the place kept up, for love of her father's memory,' he said; 'and she may have a fancy to spend a summer holiday here now and then—so we will patch up the old walls, Mistress Dormer, and make the roof weather-tight.'

Alice thanked him for this kind thought of her. Yes, she had loved her father fondly, and the house where he had lived and died must needs be always sacred in her eyes. Dame Dormer kissed my lord's hand in a rapture of gratitude, and yet, proud as she was of her darling's conquest, Lord Deverill seemed to her cold and stern, and she could not banish some faint shadow of fear for the future. Would he be always kind and thoughtful like this? or would there come a time when, his brief fancy being past, he would neglect or ill-treat his wife?

Dame Margery ventured even to hint these doubts

to her fair young charge; but the girl heard her with indignant surprise. Doubt him, her lord and her idol, that noble gentleman who seemed to her the perfection of manly grace and virtue! The poor child had seen so few people in her short life, and had heard and thought so much of her father's friend before she saw him. She had never fancied that she should love him; she had associated his image only with sentiments of reverence and esteem. Yet before she had known him a fortnight, that dark proud face, that deep thrilling voice, the haughty grace of those stately manners, learned in a statelier court than that of the second Charles, had kindled a warmer feeling in the girl's heart, and Alice Treherne loved George Deverill with all the innocent enthusiasm, the trusting worship, of a first love. That he was so much her senior, only gave him an additional charm and a loftier grandeur in her eyes. It is natural to a girl to mingle something of idolatry with her first love.

CHAPTER II.

ALICE THE BRIDE.

GEORGE DEVERILL's courtship was not a long one. Alice would fain have postponed the wedding until a year after her father's death; but her lover argued that reverence for the departed was not shown in this observance of outward forms, and that her father would himself have desired a speedy union between his orphan child and his oldest friend.

'He wished me to be your guardian, Alice,' said her lover; 'it was his dying request. What guardian so good as a husband? Nay, dearest, I am sure that he would wish us quickly married.'

Alice Treherne loved George Deverill too well to oppose any desire of his with much show of resolution. She loved him, and was ruled by him; being of a gentle yielding disposition, to which obedience and submission were natural. So the wedding—a very quiet rustic business—took place a little more than three months after Talbot Treherne was laid in

the dungeon-like vault beneath Treherne church, where his ancestors for many generations, knights, soldiers, and statesmen, reposed in peace.

Before the marriage in the church, there was another ceremonial in a small private chapel leading out of the hall at Treherne Court; where an old French priest, a hanger-on and dependent of the late Baronet during many years, united Lord Deverill and Alice according to the rites of the Roman-Catholic Church. They were of different creeds these two; but George Deverill, not being a religious man, troubled himself very little about his young wife's heresy. He did not, it is true, much relish the notion that Jesuits, like this old priest, would have a right to come between him and Alice, would possess more of her confidence than he himself, perhaps; yet he trusted in his own power to prevent too much of this priestly interference.

He carried his fair young bride to court, and was not a little proud of the admiration which greeted her in that wild assembly. He was well pleased, too, with the timidity that made her shrink from those tributes to her charms which a vainer, bolder woman would have courted.

The new home to which Lord Deverill conducted

his wife was a stately house near the river, between Whitehall and the Temple, not very far from that noble mansion of Francis Bacon's which James I. had been so eager to procure for his worthless favourite—'I must have it for Carr.'

It was rather a gloomy house, this town residence of Lord Deverill's, handsome as it was; and the street in which it was situated was narrow, and of a somewhat dismal aspect. But my lord's house was at the end nearest the river, a corner house, and the principal rooms commanded a fine view of the Thames and the opposite shore. There was a narrow flight of stone stairs leading from a door in the basement down to the water; and a grim lion's head in wrought-iron, with a chain hanging from the jaw, to which any one landing could moor his boat. At high tide the water used to cover the lower half of these stairs, and wash with a monotonous splashing sound against the stone wall of the lower chambers.

The furniture of this mansion was splendid and costly, handsomer than anything Alice had ever seen before, but of a bygone fashion, ponderous and sombre-looking. There were black-velvet hangings, and an ebony bedstead crowned with funereal plumes in the best bedchamber, and great cabinets and ward-

robes of carved ebony, which Alice was almost afraid to open. The floors were of polished oak, dark with age and much labour; and in their shining surface Alice Deverill used to see a faint reflection of herself looking up at her, as if from a pool of dark water. She thought sometimes, with a shudder, that upon such a floor as this blood-stains would scarcely be visible, and wondered whether murder had ever been done in that house.

Even the drawing-rooms had a gloomy air; there was more carved ebony, and the walls of the chief apartment were hung with a tapestry wrought by a departed Lady Deverill. On one side there was the history of Judith and Holofernes, after an old Venetian painter—not a pleasant subject for daily contemplation; on the other, the stoning of Stephen. The window-hangings were of dark crimson velvet, so dark as to seem almost black in the shadow; and before the doors there hung voluminous curtains of the same costly fabric. There were solid silver fire-irons chained to each side of the wide hearths, and everywhere the evidence of wealth. But wealth alone cannot render a house cheerful; and the only room that Alice cared to occupy was a small chamber at the end of the stately suite, with a single window, and a

stone balcony overhanging the river. This room also was hung with tapestry, but the subject of the work was gay and pleasant. Behind the tapestry there was a little door opening into a narrow passage in the wall, and a secret stair leading down to the river.

In this room Alice Deverill spent a great deal of her life, for the most part alone, busy with her embroidery-frame, her painting, her books, or her music. She was studious and fond of solitude. Her father had been a man of considerable accomplishments, and towards the close of his existence, when the wild pleasures upon which he had wasted his youth and manhood were no longer accessible to him, he had devoted himself to the education of his daughter. Thus it was that Alice possessed resources not very common to the fair sex in those days.

She liked to be alone; so, when Lord Deverill proposed to engage some well-born damsel to bear her company during the many hours in which the duties of the court and the cares of a political career kept him absent from her, she entreated him not to give her the companionship of a stranger; assuring him that the hours were never long to her, except on account of his absence; and that if she could not

have him to bear her company, she would infinitely prefer to be alone.

‘I fear thou art a spoilt child, Alice,’ he said, looking down at her with that subdued fondness which marked all his intercourse with the wife he loved so well. ‘It shall be as thou wilt have it, whether thy choice be wise or foolish.’

Never, perhaps, was a more indulgent husband than George Deverill ; not so much in words, for his pride made him reserved even to Alice, as in deeds. He loaded her with gifts—the costliest dresses, the rarest gems, a harpsichord like one that had been made in Paris for the queen, books, tiny toy spaniels such as were the rage at court ; a new carriage to take her to court, with four cream-coloured horses of matchless breeding ; everything that the most exacting of womankind could demand from an indulgent husband and an inexhaustible purse.

Alice was very grateful for all these fresh evidences of her husband’s love ; but she entreated him to hold his hand, to load her with no farther favours. In sober truth, she cared very little for the splendours that surrounded her. Those costly robes seemed to weigh down her slender figure ; those flashing jewels dazzled her eyes. She shrank abashed from the gaze

of the idle populace about Whitehall as they crowded round her gilded coach, and exclaimed aloud upon her beauty, never doubting their outspoken flatteries would be pleasing to the lovely lady within. It was altogether too loud and garish a life for this wild wood-flower, and she was never so happy as in those rare evenings which she spent alone with her husband, playing and singing to him in the little chamber overlooking the river, or sitting silent at his feet while he read and wrote.

Sometimes she fancied that he was not happy, that he had cares which he concealed from her; and on one occasion she even ventured to ask him if it were not so. But he told her no. He had no troubles that she could understand; all public life was full of care; and the state of the country was somewhat critical just now; the king careless of business, and devoted to pleasure. After this Alice wondered less when she saw her husband's brow darkened by profound thought, and never presumed to question him farther.

The poor child's fears had been but too well founded. George Deverill was not happy; and the cares which oppressed him were something more than a statesman's anxiety for the welfare of his country.

He could not bring himself to believe in his wife's love for him; he could not school himself to a perfect confidence in her sincerity. Doubts which had been lulled to rest for a while, for one brief halcyon period, had been reawakened lately, he scarcely knew how or why, and would not be banished. Again and again he asked himself why she should love him, what there was in his rugged nature to win the affection of a gentle girl; again and again he weighed the advantages her marriage with him secured to her, and asked himself whether any girl reared in poverty would reject such a splendid prospect. Alice Treherne's choice had been between his hand and a convent; and it was only natural that she should have preferred a wealthy husband and a title to the lifelong imprisonment of the cloister. He could not have told any one when it was that he began to brood upon these things, but the time came when they were perpetually in his mind.

He had a secretary, one Algernon Mildmay, a distant cousin, belonging to an impoverished branch of his mother's family, but who, slight as the relationship might be, was about the nearest of kin who remained to George Deverill. He was a studious young man, and devoted to his patron, gentlemanlike

and not ill-looking, with a pale face that was a shade too thoughtful for one so young, a low and somewhat musical voice, and a very quiet manner. He did not live in his employer's house, but had a lodging near at hand, and came and went at all hours, letting himself in and out of the house at his own pleasure, with a private key which my lord had given him.

To this young man Lord Deverill's marriage could scarcely have been a welcome event. Without being necessarily a schemer, it would have been hardly strange if Algernon Mildmay had cherished hopes of succeeding to some part, or perhaps the whole of his kinsman's fortune. And Deverill had seemed a confirmed bachelor. But whatever the secretary may have felt, he had betrayed no sign of disappointment, and had praised the bride's beauty with an amount of enthusiasm which was unusual to his calm temperament.

There were frequent entertainments now in the stately mansion by the river, dinners and suppers, music, dancing, card-playing, and feasting after the fashion of the day. Lord Deverill stood well at court, and people were pleased to accept his hospitality, and pay homage to his fair young wife, who

seemed scarcely at her ease in that gay company, and had always a plaintive look, her guests said, like one who cherished some secret sorrow.

George Deverill marked that look in the sweet face, and was ill-pleased that his wife should not take more pride and delight in her position as mistress of his house. He was not a man given to hide his anger, and he spoke bitterly of this subject one night in the presence of his secretary. There had been dancing and a banquet; but the guests were all departed, and my lord was pacing the chief drawing-room alone, while Mr. Mildmay stood by the broad hearth where the last glimmer of light and warmth had died out of the embers, waiting to know if there were letters to be written or business to be transacted that night. He was never too tired for work, this indefatigable young secretary, but had at all times a sleepless air, as of one who wanted no rest. My lord had spoken very angrily of his wife's silence and timidity.

'Twas well enough at first,' he went on in the same angry tone. 'I was not surprised to see her ill at ease among such goodly company. But 'tis time now that she showed herself worthy of the station to which I have raised her. It must not be said that

my wife is unhappy, or cherishes some secret regret for having chosen me as her husband.'

'That is surely impossible, my lord,' said the secretary, with his smooth deferential manner and low measured tones. 'Lady Deverill cannot fail to be proud of her station, and grateful for the honour you have done her.'

'Grateful!' cried my lord savagely; 'do you think I look for gratitude only from my wife? Do you think I do not demand something more than that from the woman I—' Some passionate expression of love was on his lips, but he checked himself abruptly, and ended coldly with, 'the woman I have married?'

Algernon Mildmay, like most quiet people, was a shrewd observer. He read his master's heart almost as if it had been an open book, and saw that it would be no difficult matter to raise a storm in that haughty breast, when the fitting time came. The time had not yet come for Mr. Mildmay.

'Nay, my lord,' he said, 'who can doubt that Lady Deverill loves you with all the ardour of a youthful heart? You will say perhaps that you are many years her senior; but, remember, you have gifts of mind

and person that fully counterbalance any disparity of that kind.' Carefully as he had spoken, he had said too much. His patron turned upon him fiercely.

'Nay, Master Mildmay, I did not ask you for an analysis of my claims upon my wife's affection. I was but angry with her for her pensive looks to-night, which ill became so gay an assembly.'

'Lady Deverill may perchance have pensive memories of her girlhood,' pleaded the secretary, unabashed by his kinsman's reproof. 'There are sad memories which will intrude even amid the mirth and music of a revel.'

'Argue the point no farther, Algernon,' said my lord. 'I did wrong to speak unkindly of my wife in your presence. Poor child, she has done little to deserve my chiding. She is meek and obedient in all things.'

Meek and obedient! Yes, but did she love him? *That* was the unanswerable question for ever lurking in the depths of Lord Deverill's mind, like some monster of the briny deep floating dimly beneath dark still waters, shapeless, obscure, and horrible.

'Dotard!' muttered Algernon Mildmay, as he left the house that night; 'how long is this infatuation to last?'

CHAPTER III.

MY LADY'S CONFESSOR.

It was not very long after this when Lord Deverrill had occasion to leave England on a mission to Paris; a mission involving some private business of the king's, the payment of moneys borrowed during his majesty's exile, some gossips about the court said; but the messenger himself preserved an inscrutable silence even to his wife, who had, in truth, small curiosity about state matters, but seemed dejected at the thought of her lord's departure.

'I shall be lonely and dull without you, George,' she said in her soft voice, clinging to him tenderly as he was about to leave the house.

He looked down at her, wondering, always wondering whether this tenderness of hers were real. Nature had cursed him with a suspicious mind, not easily to be lulled to rest. The sweet look in those blue eyes went straight to his heart—and yet, and yet—it would be an easy matter for a woman to pre-

tend as much as that, for the sake of a coronet, and a vast fortune, and the chance of being left by and by a wealthy widow, still in the bloom of youth.

He looked down at her, loving her with all his might, and yet not able to banish that doubt of her which was a part of his very nature.

‘Nay, child,’ he answered gently, ‘you will have all you care for—your books, your colour-box, and harpsichord.’

‘I shall not have you,’ she said, laying the fair young head with its rippling shower of pale golden curls upon his breast.

He sighed—a deep long sigh, kissed her on the brow, and put her gently from him. As he did so the door opened, and Algernon Mildmay appeared on the threshold.

‘The boatmen are ready, my lord,’ he said; ‘and the vessel sails for France in little more than an hour. Of course they will wait for your lordship, but the tide will serve them best then.’

‘I am ready,’ Lord Deverill answered.

But his wife drew him aside into the embrasure of the window.

‘Will your secretary be here in your absence, George?’ she asked in a low voice.

‘Why, of course, Alice; he will be free of the house. He has business to do that will keep him a good deal in my room down-stairs.’

‘I am sorry for that.’

‘Why, child? He will not intrude upon you.’

‘I know that. And I know it is an idle fancy—a wicked one, perhaps—that makes me dislike his presence, yes, even the idea that he is in the same house with me. Forgive me, George. He is your kinsman too, and I am bound to like him. Yet I cannot tell you what a strange fear I have of him; as if I saw written on his face, that he is destined to work some evil against me. I have felt it from the very first hour I saw him, though I have never dared speak of it till now. But now you are going away, and I am to be left all alone, my heart sinks at the thought that he will be near me.’

‘Nay, Alice, this is the most childish folly; I am vexed that my wife should harbour such a silly prejudice. The young man is of my own blood, an honest gentleman, and very faithful to me, if that be any merit in your sight.’

‘If you love him, and can trust him, I am content,’ Lady Deverill answered, with a faint sigh. ‘Yes, I doubt not my prejudice is foolish. But wo-

men and children have such fancies, often ; and they are sometimes right.'

'Farewell, Alice ; I have no leisure to talk of this nonsense.'

And so they parted ; the young wife sad at heart, the husband disturbed and irritated by his parting interview.

Had he any reason to doubt Mildmay's fidelity, he asked himself, as the rowers carried him swiftly down the stream. Nay, he had known the young man from his childhood, and had ever found him faithful and affectionate. Self-interest might have something to do with his fidelity, it is true ; but what action or what sentiment in life is not governed more or less by self-interest ? Lord Deverill did not believe in affection without a motive, or in gratitude for past favours unmingled with the hope of benefits to come.

'Mildmay knows that it is in my power to advance his prospects,' he said to himself. 'It is not likely that he would be unfaithful to me, or discourteous to my wife. And, in any case, he is a useful watch-dog ; and will see that no court fops hang about Alice in my absence.'

Lord Deverill was away something less than a

month. The mission he had been charged with was a delicate one, involving negotiations of some length; and it was business only, and not the charm of the French capital, which kept George Deverill so long away from his wife. He wrote to her twice during his absence; but she wrote to him several times—long letters full of girlish prattle about the trifles which made her life, and breathing boundless love for her husband.

The hour came at last, a sultry sunless twilight late in July, when the rowers went up the stream with the returning traveller. He had sent no notice of his coming home, preferring to drop unawares upon his household, and to surprise his wife, pleasantly perhaps, pleasantly without doubt, if there were truth in those loving letters of hers. A strange eagerness to return to her had come upon him within the last day or two, an almost feverish haste and impatience; and as he drew nearer to the end of his journey that inward fever grew stronger, till it became a kind of agony.

It was an oppressive evening, a white mist brooding over the river, and almost blotting out the tall pointed roofs and slender steeples of the city; not a breath of air stirring, and a sickly yellow light upon

the water, instead of the rosy glow of sunset. Such an atmosphere was enough to give a man a fever, Lord Deverill said to himself, anxious to account for that fierce heat and hurry in his blood. The light wherry shot in to the shore at last, and one of the men moored it to the lion's mouth, beside the stone landing-stair. There was another boat fastened there, with a man sitting in it fast asleep, at whom my lord stared wonderingly, not caring, however, to rouse and question him. He could learn all he wanted to know within.

There was a light in my lady's favourite chamber—a single lamp, which shone with a pale yellow radiance in the twilight—and the sound of music floated through the open window. George Deverill went quickly up the first flight of the narrow staircase with a light step, but half way up he stopped suddenly, and his face grew dark as midnight.

Mingled with the sound of the harpsichord, there came to him two voices; one his wife's clear soprano, the other a tenor voice that was strange to him.

'So my wife has company,' he said to himself angrily, 'and demonstrates her sorrow for her husband's absence by singing love ditties with some

strange cavalier ! There was no hint of this in her letters.'

He paused for a short space to listen, and then crept stealthily upwards till he was close to the narrow door in the tapestried wall ; an ill-made door, with cracks wide enough to enable a spy to see all that was taking place within the chamber.

The music had ceased. There was no little crowd of gay company in the room, such as George Deverill had expected to see. There was no one but his wife, who sat facing him, with her white arms folded listlessly upon the closed harpsichord, and a young man in a priest's dress—a young man with a fair perfect face and flowing chestnut hair—who stood by her side, leaning with one elbow on the instrument, and looking down at her in thoughtful silence.

It was a simple group enough, and would have made a graceful unmeaning subject for a cabinet picture ; but the sight, simple as it was, set George Deverill's heart beating with a murderous fury. They might have heard the throbbing, he thought, these two, had they not been so absorbed in the guilty delight of each other's company.

Guilty ? Yes, Lord Deverill had no doubt of his wife's guilt. Perhaps he had always expected some

such horror as this. In any case he met the calamity half way. This secret meeting—for secret he had no doubt it was; the priest's costume—a disguise, of course. Was there not evidence enough of his dishonour? To him it seemed indisputable as the mid-day sun, palpable as the earth upon which he trod.

He stood still as death at the door, looking in upon the lighted chamber through the open space beneath the clumsy upper hinge.

‘And you must really return to Holland, Edward?’ Alice asked anxiously.

‘Ay, dearest, there is no help for it,’ the young man answered with a sigh; ‘I have a home and a position yonder; here I am nothing, less than nothing; a standing shame and reproach in the eyes of one you know of. ’Tis hard to part from the one fond creature who loves me; but it would be harder to remain, and hang about you, and be nothing to you, disowned and nameless.’

Alice Deverill sighed, and for some moments remained silent, playing idly with the trinkets hanging on her jewelled châtelaine—a gift from him, the outraged husband, who stood at the door watching her, with fatal thoughts busy in his brain.

‘When must you start, Edward?’ she asked presently.

‘To-morrow night. There is a vessel sails for Rotterdam after midnight; I have made my plans to travel by that.’

‘Shall I see you no more, then?’

‘Nay, dearest. If it be safe, I will come to you to-morrow at the usual hour.’

‘For the last time. And we shall never more sing the old duets that my father was so fond of in the happy days at Treherne Court. It was a foolish fancy of mine to wish to sing one of our old favourites with you to-night, was it not, Edward?’

‘Rather an imprudent fancy, I own,’ the young man answered, smiling. ‘Your servants would be set wondering, if they heard you singing duets with your father confessor.’

Her father confessor! Yes, the priest’s cassock was a disguise; there was no trace of the tonsure on that fair young head. This man was some early lover of Alice Treherne’s, some one to whom she had given her heart, but who had been too poor to claim her for his wife.

‘She wanted a wealthy dupe,’ George Deverill said to himself; ‘and she found one. Once furnished

with a rich husband, 'twas easy to retain the favoured lover. O God, to think that smooth fair face I have idolised is but the mask of a foul false heart !'

'The servants' quarters are too remote for them to overhear us,' said Alice. 'And you will come to-morrow, at the usual hour, Edward ?'

'Yes, dearest. I suppose there is no chance of your husband's return before then ?'

'I think not. There has been no letter to announce his coming. And even if he met you, your sacred character would prevent anything like curiosity.'

'I suppose so. Good-night, my bright one.'

He took her in his arms and kissed her, with the calm air of a man to whom that embrace was a matter of course, and Alice accepted his kiss with the same air. Between lovers of such old standing it was naturally so. Lord Deverill gripped his sword-hilt. Should he spring out upon him and slay him as he stood there ? No ; he must needs have a darker vengeance than that. And what was *he*, this nameless adventurer ? Dirt, to be spurned with his foot by and by. It was she—she, the traitress—with whom he had to settle his account first.

‘To-morrow will be time enough,’ he said to himself.

Alice opened a little casket of curious Venetian work, and took out a heap of gold, which she pressed upon her lover.

‘Nay, Edward, I know that you must want money,’ she said, as he tried to refuse it; ‘and you need have no scruple in accepting this paltry gold. You cannot imagine how rich I am. My husband loads me with favours. And now, good-night; for I see you are in a hurry to be gone.’

He kissed her again, and they both came towards the tapestried door. Lord Deverill drew back into the narrow passage. It was quite dark out here, and there was no fear of his being seen, even if Alice brought the lamp to light her secret visitor downstairs, as she did presently. She stood at the top of the narrow staircase, with the lamp in her hand, till the door below closed with a grating sound, followed by the splash of oars as the boat left the shore. How lovely she looked, as she stood thus with the soft light of the lamp upon her face! Lord Deverill was startled by her beauty; it dawned upon him like a revelation, after the interval in which he had not seen her. There was something almost supernal in that fair

radiant countenance, the highest charm of which was its look of perfect innocence. And yet she was false, beyond all measure false. He stood in the deep shadow of the narrow passage until Alice had returned to her room, and then crept softly to a door opening upon the gallery, which communicated with the principal rooms and with the grand staircase. All the house was wrapped in a half darkness, a solitary lamp glimmering faintly here and there. But there was light enough for Lord Deverill, who went slowly down the shallow stairs to his favourite apartment—a spacious library upon the ground-floor, a dark and sombre chamber, out of which there opened a little room wherein the secretary was accustomed to perform his daily duties.

The library was dark, but there was a light burning in the inner room, and here my lord found Algernon Mildmay, with a dingy-looking folio volume open on the table before him, reading studiously. He looked up with a start at the sound of his patron's footsteps, and was still more startled by the ghastly pallor of the dark face, in which there was wont to be a deep crimson glow, like the lurid gleam of a stormy sunset. But he said nothing. Only his heart beat

a little quicker than usual, and a voice within him asked, 'Is it coming?'

'This is, indeed, a pleasant surprise, my lord,' he said in his courtliest tone. 'I did not even hear the bustle of your arrival in the hall without, and you came upon me like a ghost.'

'There was no noise in the hall. I let myself in with my own key.'

'Intending to come unawares upon my Lady Deverill, no doubt. What a joyful surprise for her!'

'Yes, when we meet I doubt not that it will be—a surprise,' my lord answered with a diabolical smile, and a long pause before the last two words.

'You have not seen her yet, then?'

'We have not yet met. I have a fancy for keeping the surprise a little longer. I am in the humour for a jest, you see, Mildmay. Come,' he went on, flinging himself heavily into a capacious three-cornered arm-chair opposite his young kinsman—'come, sirrah, tell me how my wife has beguiled her leisure during my absence. Has she been very gay, gadding about from house to house to air her diamonds, and display the last fashion in a brocaded robe or a flounced petticoat?'

'Nay, my lord, Lady Deverill has little taste for

that kind of pleasure, as I think you know. She has, indeed, a strange love of solitude, very rare in one so young. And she has an ardent piety, which may seem a little overstrained perchance in the eyes of a man of the world like you or me, but is, nevertheless, a charming attribute in a woman. She has spent much of her time in religious exercises, I fancy, in your absence, and has been visited by her confessor every evening for the last fortnight.'

'Her confessor! What, the old French priest from the queen-dowager's chapel?'

'No, my lord. This is a young man, a Frenchman also, I conclude; for on the few occasions when I have met him on the stairs, he has spoken to me in that language.'

'Indeed! And he has been with my lady every evening? I did not think she had so many sins to confess. Has this priest been favoured with lengthy interviews?'

'Nay, my lord, I cannot answer for the period of his visits. He has used the water staircase. I have seen his boat waiting there sometimes, when I have left the house by that way myself.'

'At what hour?'

'I have seldom gone away until ten o'clock.'

‘ A late hour for confession, truly. Perchance the holy father is with her now. I will not run the risk of interrupting their pious exercises.’

‘ But, my lord, your coming can hardly seem untimely, let it happen when it will. Lady Deverill must needs be rejoiced by your return.’

‘ Perhaps. But it is my fancy not to disturb her. Besides, it would be but a meeting and a parting in the same hour. I am in England only as a bird of passage. I sleep in the City to-night, and sail for Antwerp at daybreak. I have business of moment to settle in the Netherlands.’

‘ Private business of his majesty’s, my lord ?’

‘ Of the king’s ? Yes.’

‘ You have been at Whitehall, then, to-night, my lord ?’

‘ I have received my orders, sir,’ Lord Deverill answered sternly. ‘ This mission is a matter that lies between his majesty and myself. I permit no one to play the spy upon my affairs.’

The secretary murmured a humble apology.

‘ Let me accompany you to your lodgings in the City, my lord,’ he asked. ‘ I may be of some use to you.’

‘ No, there is nothing you can do for me — except

keep the secret of my presence here to-night. Not a word, mind, to Lady Deverill. I sleep at the Green Dragon—good-night.'

'Let me see you to the door, my lord.'

'No, keep your seat. I want no fuss or noise.'

The secretary waited, listening breathlessly till he heard the sound of the hall-door closed with a cautious hand. Then he crept through the dark library, and out into the hall where it was almost dark, and stood there behind a stone column listening intently. Yes, in the gallery above he heard the sound of a man's footstep, stealthy, but distinctly audible in the utter stillness of the house.

Algernon Mildmay crept up the staircase with light swift steps. He was just in time to see a figure disappear through a dimly-lighted archway at the end of the gallery—a tall stalwart form that was very familiar to him, the figure of George, Baron Deverill.

He followed, still very cautiously, and prepared to dart into the embrasure of a door, should his patron turn. He followed to the foot of the second staircase, and saw Lord Deverill mounting before him, mounting to the third story of that spacious mansion. On this third floor there was a range of bed-

chambers rarely occupied, and above these the garrets of the servants.

Algernon Mildmay heard his kinsman open the door of one of the empty rooms, and close it after him. Then all was silent; and after listening on the dark landing for nearly a quarter of an hour, the secretary went softly down-stairs.

‘So this is what his lordship meant by sleeping at the Green Dragon. There is a storm brewing, I fancy; a tempest which will sweep that fair-faced doll from the pinnacle to which my dotard cousin has elevated her. Is she false to him, I wonder? Who knows? Enough for me, if he think her so. And that handsome young priest would serve to make a dozen middle-aged husbands jealous. A man has no business to marry at fifty years of age. ’Tis a deliberate wrong to his next of kin. And so he means to spend the night in hiding up yonder; and in that case how about sailing at daybreak for Antwerp? Has he seen the king to-night, and is he charged with any mission in the Netherlands? No, I would wager my chances of the Deverill inheritance that those are lies. Had he seen those two, my lady and her priest, I wonder? There was that in his face which meant mischief when he came in—a murder-

ous look. Yes, I will lay my life he had seen them.'

And musing thus, Mr. Mildmay went slowly back to his little study, and sat there, brooding and listening, till late into the night. There was a pale streak of daylight in the east when he left the house, and walked back to his lodgings through the quiet streets.

CHAPTER IV.

MY LORD AVENGES HIMSELF.

It was between nine and ten o'clock upon the night after Lord Deverill's return, and a night of storm and tempest, when a tall figure with a masked face took its stand in the narrow passage behind my lady's favourite chamber. There came the sound of voices from within — youthful voices, which the listener knew too well ; but to-night he could not hear their words ; for Alice Deverill and her companion were standing at the open window watching the storm, and the noise of the wind and rain drowned the low murmur of their voices.

There was a fragile rowing-boat moored to the lion's head below, but no boatman. The mock priest was skilled in the use of the oars, and had rowed across the river from his obscure Surrey lodging before the storm began. He was watching the sky now, admiringly rather than anxiously, and a cry of rapture broke from his lips every now and then when

the vivid lightning flashed across river and city, with a tremulous blue light that gave an unearthly aspect to that familiar scene.

The masked listener, peering in at the lamp-lit room presently through the crevice in the door, fancied that Alice was pleading with her visitor, entreating him not to leave her while the storm was raging. She clung to him with pretty beseeching gestures — those tender winning ways the watcher knew so well — looking up at him the while. He smiled at her fears, laughed even, as if to reassure her, then bent to kiss the fair brow, snatched up his hat, and turned towards the door.

‘Nay, my sweet one, there is nothing to fear,’ he said in a louder voice, with his hand upon the door. ‘I have been used to all weathers. I shall be on the opposite bank in five minutes, and safe at my lodging in ten. Good-night, and God guard thee, pretty one. It may be long before you and I meet again.’

‘Ay,’ muttered the figure lurking in the shadow of the wall, ‘thou sayest truly, traitor; it may be long.’

Alice Deverill brought the lamp to the doorway; but the door below giving on the water was open, and there was a wind upon the staircase that would

have extinguished twenty lamps. In a moment they were in darkness.

‘Go back and light your lamp, child,’ said the young man, pushing her gently into the room, and shutting the door upon her.

He ran lightly down the stairs, close followed by the masked watcher. In the doorway above the river a powerful hand gripped him by the neck, and flung him round suddenly. It was too dark for him to see his assailant. He tried to draw his sword; in vain; that unknown enemy seemed to have a giant’s strength. He gave one hoarse cry for help, and in the next moment was flung down into the empty boat, stabbed to the heart.

The assassin cut the rope with his dagger, and pushed the boat out into the stream. On such a night it was scarce likely that any one had heard that one half-stifled cry for help. The murderer’s grasp had been upon the victim’s throat when the death-shriek was uttered.

He walked slowly up the stairs, wiping his poniard on the velvet sleeve of his doublet as he went. He opened the door of the little tapestried room, and went in, an awful figure, with the face hidden, and a dagger grasped in the strong right hand, the lace

ruffle torn from the bony wrist, and the velvet sleeve pushed upward to give free play to that murderous hand.

When he entered the room Alice Deverill was on her knees before a small statue of the virgin, niched in an angle of the wall. She rose at the sound of the opening door, and turned her face towards it. At the sight of that ghastly figure she gave a feeble cry, and recoiled, tottering, to the opposite wall.

The intruder uttered no word. He strode across the little room and laid a heavy hand—his left hand—upon the girl's bare shoulder.

'What, hypocrite,' he said, 'do you pray? That is, indeed, a blasphemy! You were praying for your lover's safety, perchance? Wasted breath, wench! He has gone upon the last long journey. Would'st like to follow him?'

'Lord Deverill!' cried the girl, recognising her husband's voice, altered as it was by passion; 'what madness is this? My lover! I have no lover!'

'What, not the mock priest who left you two minutes ago? Nay, 'tis easy enough for such trash to lie. But I did not come to talk. Thy last lie is spoken, girl.'

He wound one powerful arm round the slender

figure, took her to his breast in that last embrace, and plunged the dagger home to her heart as surely as he had pierced that of her late visitor.

‘She would have won me to believe her lies, if I had let her talk,’ he muttered to himself. ‘I am weaker than water where she is concerned.’

He held her in his arms still. He kissed the pale dead face—not once, but many times—more passionately than he had ever kissed it in life, when he had been too proud to reveal the intensity of his love.

He held the lifeless form for a long time, his mask flung aside now, looking down at the fair face with unspeakable woe, and yet some touch of pride in the thought that he had avenged himself. At last he roused himself from that profound reverie, laid his dead wife gently down upon a couch, and then began to make an end of his work.

He broke open caskets and cabinets, and crammed his pockets with their glittering contents. It was his business to make this deed seem the crime of a midnight robber. He scattered letters and papers on the floor, ransacked drawers and jewel-cases, until his pockets were heavy with their plunder. It was at the last moment that he stooped to pick up a let-

ter which had fallen to the ground among the rest—a letter which attracted his eye because the superscription was in his dead friend Sir Talbot Treherne's handwriting. A curious superscription too :

'To my daughter Alice.

'To be opened after my death.

TALBOT TREHERNE.'

Lord Deverill had no time to read the letter. He thrust it into his breast, and crept softly away from the room, where the servants might come at any moment to inquire for their mistress's final orders before retiring for the night.

In the gallery and on the staircase all was still. My lord resumed his mask before going down-stairs, and looked cautiously over the banisters. There was no one in the hall. He went softly down, unfastened the heavy bolts and chains of the great door, and let himself out into the rain and darkness, reckless of the storm.

He went on foot to the City in spite of the rain, which never ceased in all that weary walk. He spent the night at that hostelry of which he had spoken to his secretary, and where he had sent his luggage on arriving from France. He spent the brief sum-

mer night at this Green Dragon—a hideous sleepless night, in which his wife's dead face was always before his eyes.

Was he sorry for what he had done? No, not sorry. He loved his wife as passionately as ever, and regretted her with a desperate anguish. But he did not repent. Had the deed been to do again he would have done it, deeming the blood of those two guilty ones the sole possible atonement for his wrong.

At daybreak he was on board the Antwerp packet; a fair summer morning, unspeakably serene and tranquil after the tempest. What a lovely calm without, what a fierce tumult within, as George Deverill stood upon the deck watching the towers and steeples of the great city melt into the cloudless blue of that summer heaven!

It was not till the vessel had passed the Kentish hills and was out in the open sea that my lord remembered that letter in his breast-pocket, and took it out to read with a half-listless curiosity. What could its contents signify to him? They could not make his dead wife an honest woman, or restore to him one of those lost hopes which had brightened his life a little while ago.

The letter ran thus :

‘ The secret I am about to confide in you, Alice, is one that I have guarded jealously for five-and-twenty years of my life ; and I charge you, as you value your soul, to keep it as jealously to your dying day ; ay, even from your husband, should you marry, as it is but likely you will ere long.

‘ That Edward Harmer, whom you have called cousin, and loved with a cousinly, nay indeed, sisterly affection, which it has pleased me well to see, is no distant kinsman, orphan son of a poor and humble relation, as I have taught you to believe. He is something nearer and dearer, Alice ; he is your half-brother ; my son, born out of wedlock some four years before my marriage with your mother ; my son, by a lady of such exalted rank, that the revelation of this secret would be death to more than one. My boy’s mother still lives, and holds a lofty station at the court, having many years ago married a gentleman, her equal in rank and fortune. Edward knows this, and is willing that his own existence should be an obscure one, spent in a foreign land, rather than cause the shadow of danger to the mother whose

voice he has never heard, whose lips have never kissed him. Of my sin I need not speak here. It is a sin that ever comes back to the wrongdoer, and it has been a source of bitterness to me for many weary years ; but, alas, the burden weighs most heavily on the innocent.

‘ You, Alice, when I am gone, will be my son’s only friend ; or, at least, the sole being with whom he may claim the tender tie of kindred. Be kind to him, my beloved daughter ; and should Fate raise you to a position of wealth or power, do him whatever service you can. You know that he has a brave and noble spirit, and has loved you fondly from his boyhood. Be kind to him for my sake ; and think that, in the unknown country to which I go, your father’s ghost looks back upon you with fond regretful eyes, and blesses you.

‘ Farewell, dear child ; I have but this single request to make to one who has been ever dutiful and affectionate, and whom Heaven will surely reward in the days to come.’

This was all. George Deverill sat with the letter in his hand, like a man spellbound by some strange dream. Then, after a long interval of this strange

stillness, he rose and slowly paced the deck, thinking of the useless murder that he had done.

His wife was innocent ; the woman he had loved was pure and spotless after all. There was a rapture in that thought, which even the memory of his crime could scarcely lessen. She was dead, lost to him for ever ; but she was not ' a liar, gone to burning hell.' She was an angelic victim, for whom he could weep without shame.

There was clamour and confusion in the house by the river when Alice Deverill's untimely fate was known. The crime was attributed at once to some common robber, who had discovered by some means how my lady kept her jewels in that chamber, and had laid his plans accordingly. Algernon Mildmay, who was present at all the investigations and discussions that followed the discovery of the murder, took pains to press this view of the case ; though he had his own thoughts upon the subject, and those pointed to that secret guest who had spent a night hidden in one of the unused chambers on the third story. But this gentleman knew that, if his patron suffered as a felon, his patron's fortune would be escheated to the Crown ; and he was very anxious to spare my Lord

Deverill the shame of a public trial for murder, to be followed by the scaffold.

The fact that on the night of Lady Deverill's murder a man, stabbed to death, had been found drifting down the Thames in an open boat, attracted little notice. Midnight assassinations were common enough in that golden age, and no one thought of connecting these two crimes.

Lord Deverill lived abroad for ten years, wandering from city to city, and leading a life of wild riot and dissipation, which would have exhausted even a larger fortune than his own. At the end of that time he came suddenly home — a haggard-looking man, with white hair — and gave himself up to the law as a double murderer.

The preliminary examinations proceeded slowly ; for magistrates and lawyers were inclined to think this self-accused man a monomaniac. He had as much difficulty in proving his guilt as he could have had in demonstrating his innocence ; and he was remanded from time to time, while there was an attempt made to procure independent evidence.

He was never brought to trial. They found him dead in his prison one morning, sitting at a table with

a lighted candle still burning before him, and his wife's miniature in his hand. He died penniless. There was nothing — neither house nor land — for Algernon Mildmay to inherit. That gentleman prospered in life, nevertheless, and rose to a distinguished position in diplomacy.

MR. AND MRS. DE FONTENOY

THE season at St. Dunstons-by-the-Sea is not a long one, and St. Dunstons is not the gayest of English watering-places; but, in default of any boisterous gaiety, St. Dunstons enjoys the distinction of being eminently select and fashionable. No vulgar cockneys ever trouble the quiet of the esplanade, or jostle their betters in the smart little shops in the High-street; there are no greasy-looking eating-houses devoted to excursionists, no obtrusive public-houses or cheap concert-halls. There is a fragmentary hundred yards or so of a pier, unfinished for want of funds, where a band plays twice a week in the season; there are two hotels—one on the esplanade, and fabulously expensive; the other in a less fashionable quarter, but almost as dear. Beyond these, there is a splendid building erected by a company, and, like the pier, unfinished, which did at one time threaten to annihilate the two existing hotels, but which came to a dismal

collapse, and offers itself for sale to any aspiring speculator who may happen to pass that way.

About half a mile's length of the usual stuccoed houses, with plate-glass windows and fragile balconies, face the sea ; and at one end of the esplanade there is a little cluster of those bow-windowed dwellings, of a much earlier date, that are always suggestive of snugness and comfort. Around and about the town there are a great many pretty villas with gardens, the larger number of which are offered annually for the accommodation of visitors ; villas in every style of architecture, from the simplest rustic to the ornate Italian gothic. Conspicuous among these, there is a house that overlooks the sea from a commanding position upon the road that rises from the esplanade to the cliff—a house built by a rich merchant for his own occupation, but never occupied by him, and sold at a great loss to a local house-agent, who had furnished it in a gaudy meretricious kind of way, and had hitherto been successful in letting it every year at a very handsome rental. The house was built in the mediæval gothic style, with castellated roof, narrow windows, arched gateways, winding stairs, octagon chambers in turrets, and all manner of awkward corners and waste spaces at every turn ; but the natives

of St. Dunstons-by-the-Sea believed in the mansion as a triumph of architecture, and the tenants of Boisgilbert Hall were always regarded in a most exalted light by the tradespeople and other inhabitants of the select watering-place. The house was altogether the largest and most important in the neighbourhood; and it was supposed that any one taking it must needs be the owner of a very handsome income. If an humbler customer complained of the quality of goods dispensed to him, the tradesmen of St. Dunstons were apt to reply that the gentry at Boisgilbert Hall had consumed large quantities of those very goods, and had found them excellent. To serve Boisgilbert Hall was a warrant of excellence, in the minds of the St. Dunstons traders.

When Mr. Migson, the auctioneer, had owned the gothic mansion about four years, there came rather a dull season for St. Dunstons, and throughout the months of June and July Boisgilbert Hall remained tenantless. To the local gossips this seemed almost as much a loss as to Mr. Migson himself. At church the dresses and bonnets from Boisgilbert Hall had always afforded a delightful distraction during the hot summer mornings; on the esplanade the tenants of Boisgilbert Hall had been followed by admiring

looks and hushed whispers. They were always carriage people, of course, and had generally daughters who rode a good deal, to the delight of the local riding-master, and bathed a good deal, and promenaded the esplanade in the freshest morning toilets under convoy of a grim-looking governess.

When August began, and the gothic halls were still empty, Mr. Migson's heart grew cold with the agony of despair. He rushed into wild expenses in the way of advertising, and an ornate description of Boisgilbert Hall appeared daily in the *London Times*. Two or three letters of inquiry as to terms reached him in response to these advertisements; but the inquirers were apparently discomfited by the amount which he demanded for the hire of his gothic paradise, for he heard no more of them. He began to contemplate his mansion with despondent looks as he loitered in the garden smoking his solitary cigar, with his hands in his pockets, after his day's work; and at his nightly club at the Prince of Wales's Feathers he informed his friends that the financial prosperity of England was on the wane.

He had almost abandoned all hope of letting his house this year, and was thinking of discontinuing his advertisement in the *Times*, when a letter of a

hopeful and imposing appearance greeted him among his daily correspondence—a monster square cream-coloured envelope, with the signature ‘De Fontenoy’ scrawled in the corner, as if the writer thereof had been a cabinet minister, accustomed to the free transit of his letters by virtue of his name. The seal was a splendid combination of arms and monogram in gold and colour; the crest, a rising sun; the motto, ‘I dare.’ Mr. Migson opened the envelope in a flutter of expectation. Such a missive could mean only one thing—an application for Boisgillbert Hall. He was right; the Honourable Mr. de Fontenoy presented his compliments to Mr. Migson, and begged to know the rent of the house at St. Dunstons for six months certain, with right to continue.

If the terms were approved, Mr. de Fontenoy’s house-steward would come immediately to inspect the accommodation, and decide whether it would be adequate to the requirements of the family. Mr. Migson was requested to fix his terms in a moderate and conscientious spirit, as Mr. de Fontenoy’s household, although extensive, was conducted upon principles of strict economy.

This looked well—so different from the proverbial

recklessness of swindlers. Mr. Migson answered the letter immediately, putting his terms at the lowest possible figure, and then waited with an anxious mind for the result. Mr. de Fontenot's London address was Grosvenor-square; in itself a pledge of respectability, nay, indeed, of aristocracy. The auctioneer consulted his peerage, and found that De Fontenot was the family name of Viscount Malplaquet, and that his lordship's town mansion was in Grosvenor-square. Mr. de Fontenot no doubt resided with his distinguished parent when in town. And yet this seemed scarcely consistent with the fact of his having a house-steward of his own.

Early on the following day the house-steward made his appearance in Mr. Migson's office—a man of imposing aspect and most gentlemanlike manners. He inspected Boisgilbert Hall from cellar to garret—he was especially curious about the cellarage, which was very spacious, remarking that Mr. de Fontenot was particular as to the atmosphere in which his wines were kept—he found a good deal of fault with the rooms, in an affable kind of way; but after being softened by a very good dinner, which Mr. Migson invited him to partake of at the Prince of Wales's Feathers, with a bottle of good old port and a dish of

nectarines to follow, he pronounced that the house would do.

‘I shall tell Mr. de Fontenot that he can’t do better than come to St. Dunstons, though the place does seem a little dull,’ he said. ‘I’ve a good deal of influence with him, you know, Mr. Migson, though he’s very haughty and reserved in general; and I can generally get him to do what I want. I have been in his family for the last twenty years.’

‘Indeed! Is Mr. de Fontenot’s family large?’ asked the auctioneer, with an eye to possible destruction of his furniture by the hands of juvenile members of the new tenant’s household.

‘O dear, no; there are no children. Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenot have only been married a year. She was a Russian prince’s daughter—most accomplished creature; speaks very little English; father rolling in money, which must all come to my master when he dies.’

‘You spoke just now of being twenty years in the family,’ said Mr. Migson; ‘I suppose you were with Lord Malplaquet before his son married?’

‘Precisely. When the young gentleman was going to marry, he said to his father, “Remember, dad, as soon as ever I get a house of my own, I must have

Richards." "It'll be an awful sacrifice for me," answers the old lord; "but I suppose you must have him:" and so the business was settled. I have the entire management of Mr. de Fontenoy's establishment, and, I may say, the entire disposal of his income; for he leaves everything in my hands, and asks my advice upon every subject.'

'Is he rich?'

'Well, no, not at present—not for a man in his position. His income is only a little over seven thousand a-year; and he spends every penny of it.'

Mr. Migson rubbed his hands briskly; seven thousand a-year had a very comfortable sound; and he wished he had asked a pound or two more, when he named the weekly rent.

'You'll be wanting wines and spirits, I suppose,' he said presently, as Mr. Richards sipped his port. 'I do a little in that way myself, on commission; and I shall be very glad to secure the opportunity. You may rely upon my supplying everything of first-class quality.'

The urbane Mr. Richards called for pen-and ink, and dashed off a list of wines and spirits that astonished, as much as it gratified, the auctioneer. The amount of brandy was considerably in excess of the

wine; but the steward remarked, in an explanatory way, that his master had a great many bachelor friends, who consumed unlimited brandy-and-soda.

After this Mr. Richards returned to town, parting from his new acquaintance in a most cordial manner, and appointing the following Monday for the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy.

Early on that day Lord Malplaquet's son and daughter-in-law were duly deposited at the neat little station, with such an array of luggage as did not often encumber the platform; trunks and portmantaus innumerable, deal cases of prodigious size, travelling-bags, desks, and dressing-cases, emerged one after another from the luggage-van, and loaded as many flies as could be obtained at the station; three footmen in quiet gray liveries, and a stalwart individual who looked like a coachman, assisted in the removal of this luggage, and drove off in three of the flies in company with a couple of respectable-looking women-servants. Mr. Richards was there also, in close attendance upon his master, Mr. de Fontenoy, who had rather a foreign look, and wore a moustache and beard that quite concealed the lower part of his face; his wife was a slim little woman, with a pale face and hay-coloured hair, not a pretty woman by

any means, but with a very winning voice and manner; she was dressed with elegant simplicity, and the inhabitants of St. Dunstons, who had heard a good deal about the De Fontenots from Mr. Migson, decided that her appearance was eminently aristocratic, and did credit to the lineage of her princely papa. The loiterers about the railway-station were sorry when a close fly hid Mrs. de Fontenot's pale face from their admiring gaze, and opined that she did not often drive in so humble a vehicle. They wondered that the train had not brought any carriage or horses for the De Fontenots, and supposed that those luxuries would speedily follow them.

For an hour or so after the arrival, Mr. Richards, the steward, might have been seen pervading the little town, ordering butcher's meat and poultry, fish, vegetables, grocery, and confectionery, on rather an extensive scale. But he impressed on the tradesmen that they were on no account to attempt to take any advantage of Mr. de Fontenot's position, for he would stand no imposition of that kind.

'I know what you watering-place shopkeepers are,' he said, 'and what a way you have of bumping your prices up when you've secured a good customer; but that sort of thing won't do with me. I examine

every account with the utmost strictness ; and I never took sixpence from a tradesman by way of percentage in my life.'

The shopkeepers promised that their accounts should be rendered in the most honourable spirit, and declared that it should go hard with them if they did not prove themselves worthy of Mr. de Fontenot's confidence. It had ever been their proudest privilege to serve the gentry at Boisgilbert Hall, they added, and they had always been so fortunate as to give entire satisfaction.

'I'm very glad to hear it,' replied Mr. Richards sternly ; 'but you've got a sharp customer to deal with now, remember, and don't try on any of your usual tricks.'

He left the tradespeople subdued, but gratified. His orders had been large ; and the new household at Boisgilbert Hall seemed likely to consume more than any previous family.

Throughout the following week there was much talk in St. Dunstons about the De Fontenots. They went out less, and were altogether more exclusive in their habits, than any family who had ever occupied Boisgilbert Hall. St. Dunstons languished to behold the fair descendant of Russian princes ; but

neither on the pier nor the esplanade, neither driving nor riding, was the Honourable Mrs. de Fontenoy to be seen. People who had seen her at the station by and by explained this by the suggestion that she was in all probability an invalid, and not strong enough to go out of doors; but if that were so, there would have been a necessity for a doctor, and no medical practitioner had crossed the threshold of Boisgilbert Hall since the advent of the De Fontenroys. The St. Dunstons gossips were disappointed in Mrs. de Fontenoy for showing herself so little among them, and were inclined to resent her exclusiveness.

It seemed, indeed, as if Mr. de Fontenoy and all his set entertained a rooted aversion to daylight. The bachelor friends of whom the steward had spoken came and went, and drank copiously of that first-class French brandy supplied by Mr. Migson, and made away with more cigars than the St. Dunstons tobacconist had ever before sold to one customer; but neither they nor their host ever showed themselves in the broad light of day. How they disposed of their leisure in those bright autumn days no one in the town could imagine. There was a billiard-table, which Mr. de Fontenoy had hired from the

chief upholsterer of the town, who had to procure it expressly from London; but the gentlemen did not play billiards all day, for Mr. Migson, calling unexpectedly one afternoon on some little matter of business, had been admitted by one of the two women-servants, and had seen through the open door that the room used for billiards was quite empty; nor did he see any of the gentlemen, or hear the faintest sound of voices or laughter throughout the house. He was shown into a little room in one of the turrets, and was kept there waiting some time before Mr. de Fontenoy came to him, looking very much overcome by the heat. He had been asleep on the sofa in his bedroom, he said, and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he made this avowal. Mr. Migson was a little puzzled as to what had become of the three gray footmen, not one of whom appeared during his visit.

Late in the evening, Mr. de Fontenoy and his friends were often to be seen on the esplanade, smoking their eternal cigars, and staring lazily at the sea. The gentlemen were for the most part bearded, and had a foreign look, like their host. They had rather a martial swagger, and it was popularly supposed that they were officers belonging to crack cavalry regiments.

Time passed; but the interest felt by the inhabitants of St. Dunstons in the De Fontenots was in no manner abated. The extreme seclusion of their habits did much to maintain public curiosity. Mrs. de Fontenot attended church every Sunday morning with rigid punctuality; and it was thought very nice of her to be a Protestant, and always in such good time for the morning service. She came alone, that is to say, attended only by one of the gray footmen; and it was opined that Mr. de Fontenot was sadly deficient in religious feeling. Her dress, on these solitary occasions of her public appearance, was always in perfect taste, and excited much admiration among the feminine part of the congregation. Several of the leading families of St. Dunstons—the doctor and his wife, the lawyer and his lady, two maiden ladies—daughters of a late rector—had called at Boisgilbert Hall, and had been received by Mrs. de Fontenot, whom they pronounced a very charming person, a little diffident and retiring, but all the more interesting on that account. Mr. de Fontenot was not so popular. His manners were considered rather brusque, and his non-attendance at church was against him. He had, however, shown himself very hospitable, in a rough-and-ready military kind of way, and

had invited the morning-callers to luncheon ; but neither he nor his wife returned the calls, and the acquaintance went no farther. There was a something indefinable—which the lawyer's wife and the two maiden ladies described as a 'painful deficiency'—in Mr. de Fontenoy ; not to be wondered at, when it was considered that he never went to church.

Time passed. Boisgilbert Hall had been taken for six months, the rent to be paid at the end of that term. Mr. Migson would have preferred receiving it monthly, as he was not a rich man ; but the steward had explained to him that this was not possible, as the tenants on Mr. de Fontenoy's estate paid their rents half-yearly, and all his own payments were made in that manner. To this the auctioneer had of course submitted ; and now the end of the half-year was drawing near, and Mr. Migson rubbed his hands, in a comfortable self-congratulatory kind of way, as he reflected how soon he should touch his money.

He was destined to be awakened rather roughly from this complacent state of mind. Reading his newly arrived *Times* one forenoon, in the studious leisure of his office, where business at this dreary season of the year was rather slack, he came upon a

paragraph that affected him after the manner of a sudden application of the ice-treatment to his spine. An awful chill crept along the spinal cord, and a species of paralysis seemed for the moment to annihilate the thinking power of his brain.

‘His only son!’ he murmured feebly, ‘his only son!’

The paragraph announced the death of Hector Angus de Fontenoy, only son of Lord Malplaquet, from an accident, while deer-stalking in the Scottish highlands.

Now if Lord Malplaquet had only one son, who was the gentleman known to Mr. Migson as the Honourable Mr. de Fontenoy? To the mind of the horror-stricken auctioneer there arose only one solution of this mystery. In spite of the three gray footmen, the house-steward, and all the appliances of state, the De Fontenoy of Boisgilbert Hall were a set of swindlers, and he, Migson, had been done.

‘It may be a mistake of the reporter’s,’ he thought, and then applied himself to his peerage. No, Lord Malplaquet had only one son, and that son’s name was Hector Angus. What was to be done? The auctioneer sat before his desk for a long time, trying to think, in a helpless kind of way. There was only

one source of consolation amidst the hopelessness of his meditations. So much luggage as the De Fontenroys had brought with them could not be spirited away very easily from such a place as St. Dunstons, especially in the blank month of January, when every arrival at, or departure from, the little station was an event of importance, every detail of which afforded subject for conversation. If Mr. de Fontenoy were a swindler, he carried with him much more impedimenta than swindlers are apt to be encumbered with. But then, on the other hand, Mr. Migson reflected that all those boxes and cases might be mere representative luggage, stage-properties, phantasmal similitudes, which would turn out by and by to contain only straw and brickbats. No, there was no security to be derived from the luggage. Mr. de Fontenoy's intention was, in all probability, to levant just before the expiry of the half-year, carrying with him everything valuable that he might happen to possess, and leaving the phantasmal boxes that had helped him to throw dust in the eyes of his victims.

To prevent this, Mr. Migson determined on an immediate course of action. He wrote to a retired detective officer, the chief of a private-inquiry office, giving a full description of his tenants, and asking if

any such persons were known amongst the ranks of professional swindlers ; and, after having posted this letter with his own hand, he walked at once to Boisgilbert Hall, carrying the *Times* newspaper in his pocket.

He was admitted by one of the footmen in gray, a tall and stalwart individual, who contemplated him from head to foot with the supercilious stare peculiar to his class. Mr. de Fontenoy was at home, and disengaged. Mr. Migson was ushered to the dining-room, where he found that gentleman seated before the fire, wrapped in a gorgeous cashmere dressing-gown, and reading a French newspaper, with a cigar in his mouth and his feet on the fender.

‘ Sit down, Migson,’ he said cordially. ‘ Jones, bring a bottle of the Amontillado. Confoundedly disagreeable weather ! This place of yours seems to have a proprietorial interest in the north-east wind ; I never knew it blow so incessantly anywhere else. Well, Migson, what’s the news in St. Dunstons ? Anything stirring ?’

‘ Well, no, sir ; St. Dunstons is apt to be quiet at this time of year. But I—ahem—the fact is—that is to say—the purport of my visit this morning is—’

‘ Out with it, my good fellow !’ exclaimed Mr. de Fontenoy briskly ; ‘ don’t be shy. I suppose the fact

is, you looked in to see that things are going on all right—no ill-usage of the furniture, and so on. You are quite at liberty to take a look round the house, if you like; you'll find everything in apple-pie order. Take a cigar, and help yourself to the Amontillado.'

'Thank you, no, sir; I never smoke in the morning. The truth is, I have been a little put out of sorts by a paragraph in to-day's *Times*; and I considered it was the best plan to come straight to you and ask for an explanation of it.'

'I don't see what there can be in the *Times* to require any explanation from me,' answered Mr. de Fontenoy, staring his visitor full in the face with a puzzled look. 'However, I haven't seen this morning's papers, so I'm quite in the dark. What is it?'

Mr. Migson unfolded the paper with a solemn countenance, and placed it in his tenant's hands, with one finger pointing to the fatal paragraph.

'Yes,' said Mr. de Fontenoy, after glancing carelessly at the lines, 'very sad, isn't it? Poor young fellow! I had a letter from Scotland, announcing the fatal event this morning. I have not ventured to tell my wife about it yet. My poor cousin was a great favourite of hers.'

‘Your cousin, Mr. de Fontenoy?’

‘Yes, my first cousin—Hector, son of the late Lord Malplaquet, my uncle. Why, how you stare, Migson! O, I see this paragraph omits the word “late” before his father’s name. Very stupid of those penny-a-liner fellows, to be sure!’

‘Then your father is the present lord, Mr. de Fontenoy?’

‘Of course; I thought you had been told that.’

‘Well, yes, sir; but if this Mr. Hector de Fontenoy is your cousin, how is it he didn’t succeed to the title after his father, in the usual way?’

‘Political services, Mr. Migson. In our family the title passes from brother to brother. It’s rather a peculiar arrangement, arising from the special circumstances under which the title was bestowed upon my great-grandfather, the first Lord Malplaquet.’

Mr. de Fontenoy’s easy manner was reassuring; but the auctioneer was not convinced. Are not swindlers usually renowned for their easy manners?

‘The fact of the matter is, sir,’ said Mr. Migson, ‘it has been a very great inconvenience to me waiting six months for my rent; and if you could come to a settlement with me now—it wants only five weeks to the half year—I should esteem it a favour.’

Mr. de Fontenoy flung away his cigar, and drew himself up sternly.

'Mr. Migson,' he exclaimed, turning fiercely on the auctioneer, 'this unwarranted application is prompted by a low suspicion, inspired by that paragraph. You presume to doubt my claim to the position which I occupy and the name I bear. This is too much, sir. I shall pay you your rent to-morrow at noon, in sterling coin of the realm; no, sir, I shall not offer you a cheque, the validity of which you might venture to suspect; I shall pay you and all other claimants in gold. I shall not wait for my Irish rents; I shall telegraph to my bankers for a reserve which I happen to have at my disposal, and I shall leave your house at two o'clock to-morrow.'

This was said with a grandeur of tone and manner that overawed the poor little auctioneer. Was it possible he had offended a substantial tenant, who would have been a source of permanent profit but for his untimely suspicion? He stammered out a feeble apology, assuring Mr. de Fontenoy that his application had been prompted only by his own necessities.

'Do not waste trouble upon apologies, sir,' answered his tenant with undiminished fierceness; 'I

am of a temper that never forgives an insult. At two o'clock to-morrow I quit your house. If you have any doubt as to my proceedings in the interval, you had better set a watch upon these premises, in order to assure yourself that nothing is removed.' He rang the bell, which was answered immediately by one of the footmen.

'Send Richards to me,' he said.

While the auctioneer was still faltering his apologies, Mr. Richards appeared, grave and deferential of manner in the presence of his master.

'Richards, you will go round to the tradesmen, and tell them to send their accounts in before six o'clock this evening, and you will devote your evening to the examination of them; you will also be good enough to telegraph to the Union, telling them to send me down fifteen hundred in gold. I suppose that amount will about cover our accounts here, including Mr. Migson's rent?'

'About that, I think, sir.'

'Good; and, Richards, you will see that everything is packed by to-morrow at twelve.'

'Yes, sir.'

'That is all. You may show Mr. Migson to the door.'

In the hall the auctioneer begged for a few words with his good friend Mr. Richards, and, taking that gentleman by the button-hole, told him how he had been so unlucky as to offend Mr. de Fontenoy. Could not Mr. Richards make matters right?

The steward shook his head with a decided negative. 'Impossible,' he said. 'My master has a very unbending temper, and if he has once decided on a thing, there's nothing will move him from it. I saw by his face that there was something wrong directly I came into the room. What a pity you offended him! Now, if you had applied to me in the first instance, as you ought to have done, I could have got you the money without the slightest difficulty.'

Mr. Migson regretted his want of diplomacy. It would have been better in every way to have sounded the steward first. He went back to his office terribly crestfallen. He did not attempt to keep any watch upon Boisgilbert Hall, as Mr. de Fontenoy had suggested, but he sent his clerk to hang about the station, in order to make sure that there was no premature departure therefrom on the part of his tenants. At his club that evening he found himself a subject of reproach from his fellow-tradesmen, who had heard from the steward that Mr. de Fontenoy was leaving

St. Dunstons solely on account of his landlord's insulting doubt of his position.

As the St. Dunstons clocks struck twelve next day, all the shopkeepers who had served Boisgilbert Hall presented themselves at that mansion, according to the appointment made by Mr. Richards, the steward. With them came Mr. Migson, very subdued of aspect. They were received in the dining-room, where Mr. de Fontenoy was lounging in front of the fire, with his hands in the pockets of his morning-coat, and a cigar between his lips as usual. He acknowledged the respectful salutations of the tradespeople with a haughty nod. Mr. Richards was seated at one end of the long dining-table, with an array of gold spread out before him, in little glittering piles of tens and twenties. It made the mouths of the St. Dunstons dealers water, to look at all that shining specie. It was like being in a bank.

'I am sorry to leave you so abruptly, my good people,' said Mr. de Fontenoy, in sharp decisive tones; 'but I am a man of peculiar temper, and I never forgive an insult. The owner of this house presumed to question my right to the name I bear—a name which, I need not remind you, adorns the peerage of this realm. Such insolence on his part

left me no alternative. I could not, in justice to myself, inhabit a house belonging to a man who could so outrage my self-respect. As there happens to be no other house in your little town suitable to the requirements of my household, I had no resource but to leave St. Dunstons. My trunks are packed, and we quit this place by the two-o'clock train.— Richards, be so kind as to give these good people their money.'

Mr. de Fontenoy lit another cigar, and looked on with a gentlemanlike indolence of manner while his steward dealt out the little heaps of coin, in sums ranging from fifty to three hundred pounds. The obsequious tradespeople received their money with profound satisfaction, and one by one bowed themselves out of the room, expressing their respectful regret at Mr. de Fontenoy's departure.

Mr. Migson was the last to be paid. He sighed as he counted the sovereigns into a little canvas bag, reflecting that these were the last he was to receive from one who might have been a permanent tenant, but for his own unlucky precipitation.

'My steward will leave the key at your office, Mr. Migson,' Mr. de Fontenoy said haughtily, in response

to the auctioneer's humble apologies; 'I have nothing more to say.'

Waiting for him at the gates of his domain Mr. Migson found his friends and fellow-tradesmen, and these gentlemen were not sparing in their reproaches.

'A nice thing you've done for yourself and us, Migson,' said Mr. Till the butcher, a leading personage in St. Dunstons, 'with your blundering suspicion. It's a pity you don't know a gentleman when you see him.'

'It was that paragraph in the *Times*,' murmured Mr. Migson disconsolately; 'and I never did hear of a peerage passing over a son to go to a brother.'

'Didn't Mr. de Fontenoy tell you it was given for political services? Of course that makes all the difference. However, you've lost a good tenant, and we've all lost a first-rate customer, and there's no use in saying any more about it. You'll know how to hold your tongue another time, I daresay, Migson; but the worst of a suspicious man is, that he's always suspicious in the wrong place. When you do get a swindler in your house, you're pretty sure to be taken in by him.'

The auctioneer submitted meekly enough to these upbraidings. At home he had still more bitter words

to hear from the lips of his better half, who had made Mrs. de Fontenoy's bonnets her study at the parish church, and who had a profound belief in that lady's grandeur. Mr. Migson locked the canvas bag of gold in his iron safe with the guilty air of a man who is putting away the proceeds of a murder. Had he not, with ruthless hand, slain his own good fortune?

The De Fontenots departed from the station at two o'clock with much pomp and ceremony, attended by the three gray footmen and the careful Richards. Again the porters had occasion to remark the extreme heaviness of the great deal cases, and opined that those ponderous chests contained the De Fontenoy plate. With the two o'clock train every vestige of the De Fontenots disappeared; and before three Mr. Migson made his dismal entry into Boisgilbert Hall, accompanied by a deaf old charwoman who was in the habit of taking care of the house for him when it was empty. He went through the rooms disconsolately, groaning over their dreary emptiness. Everything was in very decent order. The De Fontenots had done little damage. Every room in the house smelt of stale cigars; but open windows and a general cleaning would of course banish this tobacco-tainted

atmosphere. On the whole, Mr. Migson found no reason to complain of his lost tenants.

He absented himself from his club at the Prince of Wales's Feathers that evening, not caring to face his injured fellow-townsmen, and he spent the hours drearily enough by the domestic hearth, listening dolefully to Mrs. Migson's prophecies that Boisgilbert Hall would remain unlet until the following July or August.

He was sitting in his office the next morning, writing the catalogue of an approaching sale, when a little man, with a sharp eager face, came in at the half-glass door.

'Mr. Migson, I presume,' he said.

'Yes, sir, my name is Migson,' replied the auctioneer, jumping off his stool and handing the stranger a chair.

'My name is Peacock, and I am a detective officer attached to Scotland-yard,' said the stranger, in a sharp concise manner that corresponded exactly with the sharpness of his countenance. 'You wrote a letter to a private-inquiry office, asking for information about a party by the name of De Fontenoy.'

'I did write such a letter,' Mr. Migson admitted; 'but I have since had reason to believe Mr. de Fon-

tenoy a perfectly solvent person; that I was labouring under an unfortunate mistake, in short.'

'What does that mean? He has paid you, I suppose?'

'Yes, he has paid the full amount due to me.'

'And he paid you in gold, I suppose, didn't he?'

'How did you know that?' asked the startled auctioneer.

'Because, if he's the man I think he is, he's rather liberal with his gold at times. However, the best thing I can do is to go and take a look at him, if you'll show me the way to your place.'

'The De Fontenoy's left St. Dunstons yesterday at two o'clock,' replied Mr. Migson.

'The devil they did! Then I believe as good a chance as ever I had of landing a big fish has slipped through my fingers. I only got a hint from the man you wrote to last night. There was no one he knew of in the swindling line answering to your description, but he thought the case might be something in my way. Was this De Fontenoy a tall dark man, with a small scar over the right eyebrow, and a very prominent chin?'

'Yes, that's the man.'

‘I thought as much. You haven’t disposed of the money he paid you?’

‘No.’

‘Let’s have a look at it.’

Mr. Migson opened his iron safe, with a sinking sensation very much like sea-sickness. He handed the little canvas bag to the detective, who untied the string and threw a heap of glittering sovereigns out upon the auctioneer’s desk with a contemptuous gesture.

‘Hark at ‘em!’ he cried; ‘did you ever hear gold rattle like that? Look at the milling,’ he added, feeling the edge of a sovereign with his thumb. ‘Very well done; but nothing like the genuine article.’

‘Do you mean to say the money’s bad?’ faltered Mr. Migson.

‘Every fraction of it. The sovereigns are worth about a shilling a-piece in the trade, and Mr. de Fontenoy is a man best known as Slippery Joseph, one of the most daring coiners that ever lived. There’s been no end of bad sovereigns in circulation for the last six months, and we’ve been sorely put to it to tell where they came from. There’s not a den in London that hasn’t been searched, while our gentleman and his pals have been doing their work on the

quiet down here. And now let's go and have a look at your place.'

Mr. Migson accompanied the detective to Boisgilbert Hall; and in the cellarge of that mansion they found ample evidence of the nefarious trade that had been carried on by Slippery Joseph and his gang, who had lived on the fat of the land at St. Dunstons-by-the-Sea while their accomplices were circulating the base coin in London and other large cities. Mr. Peacock hastened back to town directly after his inspection, leaving Mr. Migson to lament his loss, and to communicate the miserable news to his fellow-sufferers. A doleful unanimity prevailed that night at the Prince of Wales's Feathers; and it was long before the shopkeepers of St. Dunstons recovered from the severe shock. About two months after his departure they had the hollow satisfaction of reading the account of Mr. de Fontenoy's arrest. He had taken a large house at Bayswater, and stood high in the opinion of his tradespeople at the time of his capture. He was sentenced to penal servitude, in which his accomplices, the three gray footmen and the plausible Mr. Richards, participated. Mrs. de Fontenoy, who had been a lady's-maid in the household of Lord Malplaquet, and whose knowledge of

the affairs of that family, and friendly acquaintance with her old fellow-servants at the house in Grosvenor-square, had been of considerable use to her husband, was not implicated in the felonious dealings of the gang, and was left to mourn the loss of her brilliant position as the daughter and heiress of a Russian prince.

A GOOD HATER

‘SIR,’ said Dr. Johnson, ‘I like a good hater!’ Philip Rayner used to boast that in this respect he was a man after the great lexicographer’s heart. ‘I never forgive an injury,’ he said, ‘and I never forget a kindness.’ True, there are certain gracious sentences recorded in the teaching of our Saviour, and treasured in the writings of St. Paul, which do not quite harmonise with Samuel Johnson’s dictum ; sentences which inculcate an inexhaustible capacity for the pardon of wrongs ; precepts which show us how poor a thing it is only to love them who love us. Perhaps Philip Rayner would have been very angry in those early days if any one had disputed his claim to the title of Christian. He went to church once every Sunday ; twice sometimes, when the day of rest seemed especially long, and he had nothing better to do with his afternoon leisure ; and if he did not listen very attentively to the voice of the preacher, or join with any

great fervour in the ritual, he at least offered a good example to the multitude by his well-brushed clothes, spotless linen, and decorous behaviour. He paid his debts to the uttermost farthing, and was not altogether wanting in benevolence, contributing to certain old-established respectable charities in a fair proportion to his income.

The world in which he lived spoke well of Philip Rayner. He was a clever prosperous young man, with a character unsullied by vice, an agreeable personal appearance, and a manner that was very quiet, but not wanting in pleasantness. A thoughtful young man too, who was apt to contemplate all things in their gravest aspect. For the rest he was very happily placed in the world, being the only son of a wealthy leather merchant, who had carried on a prosperous trade for the last forty years in some gloomy old premises in the river-side district beyond the Tower.

His father had educated this only son upon a rough-and-ready principle of his own. No Eton or Harrow, no expensive University education, no riotous career amongst the patrician youth of Oxford or Cambridge, to spoil the lad for commercial pursuits, and a quiet humdrum middle-class life. Old Samuel

Rayner sent his boy to a respectable mercantile academy, the principal whereof was instructed to give his pupil a sound mercantile education ; no perpetual grinding at the adventures of pious Æneas, no useless grubbing amongst Greek roots, but plenty of book-keeping by double entry, a profound study of tare and tret, and a familiar acquaintance with fractions. This was the kind of teaching Mr. Rayner demanded for his son, and the boy had it. His education seemed to him rather a dull business altogether ; but he went through it patiently enough, and finally emerged from the mercantile academy a first-rate arithmetician, a very fair French and German scholar, and a marvel of excellence in the way of penmanship.

Philip Rayner's home life, for the first five years after he left school, was not particularly cheerful. The old man elected to live, where his forefathers had lived before him, in a big gloomy mansion adjoining the business premises of Rayner, Rayner, and Sons. The brass-plate on the counting-house door which bore this inscription had been old and worn when Samuel Rayner was a little boy, and the Rayner, Rayner, referred to thereby were two dryasdust brothers, who had worn snuff-coloured small-clothes, and snuff-coloured coats with bright brass buttons,

and brown George wigs on their elderly heads, in the days of the great rebellion. They had traded in hides when Lovat lay in the Tower close at hand, these departed gentlemen, and now slept side by side in a queer little old churchyard beneath the shadow of the great fortress, a burial-place that has long been shut up. Philip Rayner used to stand at the rusty iron gate, and stare listlessly in at the nettle-grown graves, sometimes of a sultry summer evening, when he took his solitary walks abroad, and was sorely perplexed how to dispose of his leisure in that remote region.

It was a dismal home for youth certainly, that great gaunt red-brick mansion, with its wide ghastly oaken staircase, where in the twilight it would seem more natural to meet some phantasmal lady in a brocaded sacque, or some withered gentleman in powder and velvet, with silk stockings rolled over his knees, than to encounter any modern flesh-and-blood creature. Such deep-toned oaken wainscots ; such marvels of wood-carving over obscure doors and in forgotten passages ; such vast and darksome closets in every direction ; such a delicious house altogether for a connoisseur in old houses, but O, such a gruesome place to live in !

Happily, Philip Rayner was not troubled with an imaginative temperament; he accepted his life very quietly, only thinking that it was rather a dull world upon the whole, and that perhaps his happiest days had been those of his academical existence, with their riotous gambollings in the great playground at Peckham, and their stolen feastings in the dormitories. He thought it rather a hard thing that his father had not a fine country house, with gardens and hot-houses, stabling and billiard-room, like other men in his position; but whenever he ventured to argue the point with the old gentleman, he ended by agreeing with his parent that it was a foolish thing for a man to waste all his substance on splendour and show, and be obliged to face the bankruptcy-court in his old age.

‘When I die, you will be one of the richest men in the leather trade, Phil,’ the old man usually wound up by saying; ‘and you wouldn’t have been that if I’d sent you to the University, and squandered my income on country houses, and carriages, and horses.’

So Philip, not having any extravagant propensities, came to consider things from his father’s point of view, and to think that it was, after all, a good

thing that they had no splendid suburban mansion at Dulwich or Clapham, Sydenham or Richmond, to absorb the profits of their trade. He came very soon—too soon, considering how young a man he was in these days—to have the same keen interest in savings and investments, for their own sake, that his father had; to thrust his hands deep down in his pockets with a sense of satisfaction when he remembered how little he and his father spent in their quiet life, and how much there was out at interest, and growing more day by day. He read the money article in the *Times* every morning directly after his father, and the two discussed the state of things on 'Change with never-failing interest.

He grew in time, too, to have a warm liking for that gloomy old house; grew to have prim bachelor ways in advance of his years, and to think it mattered very little where a man lived so long as he was comfortably lodged and well catered for. It was not a mean or sordid household by any means. There was a gray-headed old butler, who had been custodian of the cellars and the massive old plate for the last thirty years, and who would have laid his head on the block in the adjacent Tower rather than compromise the family dignity by any neglect of his duties; there

was a housekeeper of fabulous antiquity, who remembered the last hours of the last snuff-coloured gentleman ; and there were a couple of prim sour-visaged maid-servants of a discreet age, selected by the housekeeper, who, change as they might as to their individuality, never underwent any variation as to those two qualities of primness and sourness.

There was no other woman in the little household. Philip's mother had died years ago, when he was quite a small boy in brown-holland pinafores, and with what seemed to his young mind a perpetual whooping-cough. She was dead. There was a portrait of her in an obscure room opening out of Philip's bed-chamber, a picture which had been banished there in the early days after her death, when the bereaved husband could not endure to be reminded of his affliction, and which had never been restored to its place of honour. Philip used to look at this portrait sometimes, wondering what difference it would have made in his life had his mother lived. He felt that there would have been a great difference somehow, but could not divine the nature of it. The face in the picture was a pretty face enough, fair, and girlish, and gentle ; but to the son it seemed of an

angelic beauty. Perhaps this feeling for the mother whose living presence he could scarcely remember, was the one touch of romance in Philip Rayner's character.

He was thirty years of age, and had been his father's coadjutor and representative in the business for the last ten years of his life. The father was growing quite an old man now; was subject to severe attacks of gout, which kept him a prisoner to his armchair, much to his aggravation, and Philip was almost sole manager of the business. He consulted his father day by day, it is true, but the consultation was a kind of formula, for Samuel Rayner's brain was beginning to lose its business faculty.

In all these years, since he had left school upon his seventeenth birthday to enter into the proud possession of a stool in his father's counting-house, Philip Rayner had made only one friend. This was a young man who came into the office a little later as corresponding clerk, more especially for the foreign correspondence, which was heavy in the house of Rayner, Rayner, and Sons. The lad was two years younger than Philip, and was little more than a lad fresh from a German university, when he began his commercial career. His name was George Tolson,

and he was the son of a major in a crack regiment, who had made ducks and drakes of a very handsome fortune, and had cut his throat one morning in a fit of delirium tremens, leaving a widow and two helpless orphans to face a life which he had done his best to render hard for them.

Some benevolent friends had come forward to help the forlorn woman, and the boy had been sent to Germany, and the girl to a semi-charitable school for the rearing of officers' daughters; so they had struggled on somehow, until the boy was able to win a livelihood by his industry, and the girl old enough to go out as governess. The mother had a lodging somewhere in an obscure street on the Surrey side of the Thames, and here George used to return every evening when his office duties were over.

The friendship between these two young men did not arise all in a moment. Philip Rayner was by no means impulsive, and George Tolson, though free and frank as the winds of heaven, was too proud to make the faintest advance towards the son of his employer. For some time these two behaved towards each other with a supreme reserve; but they were the only young men in the office, and little by little the ice melted, until acquaintance ripened into friend-

ship. They had few tastes in common. George Tolson was much more versatile, of a brighter and more joyous nature, than his master's son ; but they were both young, and that made a bond between them. Nor was this the only link. There were circumstances in George Tolson's life which awakened a keen interest in the mind of Philip. He had discovered that George was the chief support and devoted companion of his mother, and he envied him so tender a tie, so precious a duty. He used to walk home with George on summer evenings, now and then, and growing bolder and more familiar by slow degrees, would consent by and by to drop in upon the widow, and take a late cup of tea after his walk, or play a game of chess with George while the mother looked on. If he had possessed the power to help his friend in any substantial manner, he would have done it ; but he was still in a state of tutelage, and Samuel Rayner thought he did quite enough in giving the young man a liberal salary. All that Philip could do was to testify his regard for the widow by such small gifts as he could afford for the embellishment of her scantily furnished lodging—a plated tea service—a new chess-board and men—a pair of china vases for the mantel-piece, and so on. They were trifling gifts, but very

precious to Mrs. Tolson, who had not been favoured by such tributes of late years.

And so the years went on, with a quiet monotony which was pleasant enough to Philip, who had no yearning for change. He and George used to walk together a great deal in those long summer evenings, late into the autumn even, when lamps were flaming in the misty streets, or in the cold spring nights, when a great wind blustered in every open space and at every street corner. There was not a nook in the old City they left unexplored in these evening rambles, only now and then pushing their way beyond that labyrinth of brick and mortar, to some healthy hillside out north, or rural-looking common in the south. They were very happy together, George full of wild reckless talk about lives that were different from theirs; lives of adventure in distant lands, lives in camp and on board ship, tossed about by the winds and waves, and in frequent contest with savage foes; the kind of life he longed to lead, in short, instead of that dryasdust life of the counting-house, which might go on for ever, and leave him no better man than he was now.

‘You get an increase of salary every year, you know, George!’ suggested the practical Philip. ‘It’s

not such a bad thing, after all. And if you stick to business, by and by, when we are both middle-aged men, I may be able to give you a junior partnership.'

'Yes, I know you're very good, old fellow, and the governor is very good, and I'm altogether better off than I deserve. But you see I don't think I was intended for that sort of life. There's too much of my father's blood in me. The Tolsons have been soldiers time out of mind. If it hadn't been for my mother, I should have enlisted ever so long ago.'

He looked very handsome as he said this, with his hat off, and his waving auburn hair blown off his forehead by the light summer wind. The two young men were sitting on an old bulkhead in a deserted wharf above the swift-flowing river, a pleasant solitary spot enough in the heart of the great City, and a favourite resting-place with them after a long ramble.

Yes, he was very handsome, in a noble picturesque style. One could fancy that the blood of fighting Cavaliers, rebellious Jacobite gentlemen of the old time, ran in his veins. There was an ardour and fullness of life about him not common to modern commercial youth. The bright blue eyes used to light

up with a sudden fire when he was vehement, the flexible lips had a hundred mutations of expression. He was a striking contrast to his friend in this, whose dark good-looking face underwent few changes. A solid square forehead, deep-set grave gray eyes, a firm mouth, and a clear dark skin were the distinguishing marks of Philip Rayner's physiognomy.

A change came in Philip's life soon after this—a change which seemed to make a new man of him, from which he afterwards dated the beginning of another existence. It was as if a door had opened and shut upon all the life that had gone before, and he had passed out of that close narrow atmosphere into a new world; a world of light, and air, and sunshine, that was brighter and fairer than anything he had ever known or dreamt of before. In plain words, Philip Rayner fell in love.

It happened one morning that the old dealer in hides took less interest than usual in the money article, laid aside his particular portion of the *Times* with a long-drawn sigh, and sat gazing meditatively at the fire in so fixed an attitude, and with such a rapt countenance, that Philip laid down his paper too, and looked at his progenitor wonderingly.

'Is there anything amiss, father?' he asked.

‘No, no, Phil, no ; nothing amiss, nothing amiss. The fact is, I’ve had a letter.’

‘Some very particular letter, I suppose?’ the younger man hazarded anxiously.

‘Yes, a particular letter, Phil, in a hand I never thought to see again in this world ; a letter from the dead.’

‘What do you mean, father?’

‘When I married your mother, Philip, it wasn’t exactly to be called a love-match, though I was fond of her then, and grew to be fonder of her afterwards, poor soul. But I had been in love before, and she knew it. I was in love with a first cousin of mine, an orphan girl, that my father and mother had brought up on charity. You’d laugh at me, I daresay, if I were to tell you how I loved that girl ; for such things sound foolish when a man is old and feeble, with one foot in the grave. But I loved Catherine Marsh with all my heart and soul. The old people were dead against our marrying at first, seeing that Catherine was no better than a pauper, as they said ; but they were fond of her in spite of their talk, and finding that my heart was set upon the business, my father gave way, and of course my mother didn’t hold out after him. It was all settled. I fancied myself

the happiest man in Christendom. Well, Phil, it's an old story, and common enough. She jilted me. She never had loved me, I suppose. However that was, she ran away with an Italian fellow called Paroldi, Joseph Paroldi, who taught my sister Rosa singing; an idle scapegrace, with nothing in his favour but a handsome face and a specious taking manner. She ran away with him one morning, leaving a penitent little note for me, to say that she had turned Catholic some time before, and that they had been married at the Roman-catholic church in Moorfields.'

'What a heartless hussey!' cried the son. 'You never could forgive such treachery as that, father.'

'Well, Phil, it was a hard thing for a man to forgive, wasn't it? I was furious against her at first, and felt as if I could have killed her if she had come across my path in those days. But little by little I got to think of her differently, remembering what a young thing she was, only just turned eighteen, when she married that scoundrel, and recalling looks and words of hers that had hinted at some secret trouble weighing upon her mind, until I began to believe that she had struggled hard to be true to me, and

had often wanted to tell me all. So, you see, it ended by my forgiving her.'

Philip Rayner shrugged his shoulders with an involuntary expression of contempt for his father's weakness.

'I could never have brought myself to do that,' he said.

'Ah, you think not, Phil,' answered the old man, 'you think not; but when a man has once loved a woman, her face is always rising up before him, pleading to him to think tenderly of her, let her have treated him as badly as she may. It always ends with his forgiving her. The memory of the days when he thought she loved him is too much for his manhood. It always ends so.'

'It would never end so with me,' muttered the young man, clenching his fist vindictively. 'Nothing upon this earth could induce me to forgive a woman who had jilted me. But how about the letter you talk of father, and what has that to do with this old story?'

'It is from her, Philip, from Catherine Marsh—Catherine Paroldi; the last letter she ever wrote. She is dead. Another hand tells me that at the end of the letter; her daughter's. She is dead, and has

left one child, a girl, the last of a large family, all dead but this one. Paroldi took her out to the West Indies, it seems, where they did well enough for many years, but had much sorrow, the climate killing their children one after another; the last of the flock lived, that was all. Then came reverses; the man's health failed him, and ten years ago he died. After that the poor soul kept herself and her child by teaching. She was always a sweet musician, with a voice as clear and fresh as the skylark's, and I think it was that fellow's music tempted her away from me. And so she got on somehow, she says in her letter, till she felt death close at hand; and then, not having one wealthy friend in the world whose bounty she could entreat for her child, except myself, and knowing that I was a good man, she says, poor soul, she turns to me, beseeching me for Christian charity, if not for the memory of those days when I loved her—when did I not love you, my sweet cfuel Catherine?—to befriend her orphan daughter. She does not ask me to do much for the girl; not to adopt her, or maintain her in a life of idleness; only to put her into some way of making an honest living, and to keep her from falling into dangerous hands. The letter came by hand this morning. The girl is in

London. What am I to do, Phil? You are the master now, as I take it. Whatever I save is saved for you; whatever I spend is so much out of your pocket. What shall we do with Catherine Paroldi? She has been christened after her mother, Catherine.'

'It is hard for a woman to get her living now-a-days,' Philip answered thoughtfully; 'a young woman too, and a foreigner, as you may say. A girl's keep costs next to nothing. She might live here, surely, father. Mrs. Dorking would take good care of her.'

'Yes, that would be well enough for the girl, for the time. But by and by; she must get her living by and by, Phil.'

'She would be better used to English ways, after a year or two. And you would leave her a trifle, I daresay, father.'

'I don't know about that; it's generous of you to think of it, Phil.'

Philip Rayner was not ungenerous. He liked the idea that the profits of the business were yearly increasing, and that there was money being sunk from time to time, of which he must needs be master by and by. But he was not a miser, and he did not care about spending money. His narrow life had crippled his imagination in that respect. He had no

yearning for the follies or pleasures upon which the spendthrift wastes the hard-earned thousands of his forefathers.

Catherine Paroldi came to the old house near the Tower. A tall slim slip of a girl, with a very dark complexion, browned by West-Indian suns; not lovely to look upon, by any means, Philip thought at first, but with eyes of wondrous power and beauty, as he came to understand before long, and with a tender half-pleading, half-bewitching manner, not long to be resisted by the heart of man.

She was not very gay at first, this friendless orphaned girl of seventeen years old, for the shadow of a great sorrow was still upon her; yet she brightened the old house by her presence in a greater degree than Philip Rayner could have imagined possible. It was a new thing to come home and see her sitting in the grim wainscoted parlour; it made his coming home something different from what it had been. He used to be startled by finding himself thinking of this dark-eyed Catherine sometimes in business hours, when he had a file of accounts or a ponderous ledger before him. The days seemed longer to him than of old, and he wondered at his eagerness to go

home to the quiet dinner and long quiet evening, when Catherine sat at a little table near the old man, busy with some complicated piece of embroidery, for which, with all other delicate kinds of fancy work, she had an especial genius.

There would be no difficulty about her getting her own living by and by, Samuel Rayner said, seeing how industrious the girl was. Philip thought that she might never have any occasion to earn a living for herself. It would have seemed a hard thing for one so tender and gentle to be turned adrift upon a cold cruel world. And what could they do without her in that dreary old house, having once known the magical brightening influence of her presence? She had a hundred little arts by which a woman can embellish the dullest home, and little by little, as she found herself privileged to do these things, exercised her pretty trivial arts. Quaint old China jars and bottles, and cups and tea-pots, that had been hidden away in remote cupboards, blackened with the dust of ages, came out of their hiding-places, and were placed about, here and there, making patches of light and colour in the darksome rooms. The ponderous old furniture was polished into a kind of beauty, and by a new disposition of old material she brought

light and air into gloomy corners. Flowers bloomed here and there in the windows, and a pair of pet birds of gay plumage, which she had brought with her from Trinidad, enlivened the family parlour. There was a new atmosphere in the house, somehow, and Philip felt the change keenly.

Perhaps at this time Mr. Rayner the younger did not care quite so much for the society of his chosen friend George Tolson. It was mid-winter, and there was considerable excuse for the suspension of their evening rambles; but Philip felt that he was not treating his friend quite fairly, and in order to make some amends, invited him home to dinner once or twice a week. The old man had no objection to his company; the son was quite master now.

It may be that Philip wanted to hear Catherine Paroldi's praises from the lips of the friend whose judgment he believed in. He was certainly gratified when George spoke of the beauty of her dark eyes, and the charm of her singing. She had found the key of the old-fashioned square piano in a corner of the parlour, the piano at which her father had taught Miss Rayner singing; and she sang and played to her benefactor and his son sometimes of an evening. Her voice was a clear thrilling soprano, her touch

upon the keys full of tenderness and feeling. She sang all the old English ballads which Samuel Rayner loved, besides Italian music of the best kind, which her father had taught her while she was quite a child.

Philip was no musician. He had only a vague consciousness of melody in Catherine's singing. It was a pleasant soothing influence for him ; a little melancholy, perhaps, awakening a dim sense of sadness in his breast—that was all. He would scarcely have distinguished one of her songs from another, without the words. He felt this deficiency of his rather keenly when George Tolson was with them, for George had a fine baritone voice and considerable taste for music, and would sing a duet with Catherine very often. It seemed to bring those two closer together, and for the first time Philip felt a pang of jealousy. He was angry with himself for the feeling, and made a great effort to overcome it, asking his friend to the old house all the oftener, because of this secret weakness.

‘What fear need I have of him, if she loves me?’ he argued with himself; ‘and if not, what can it matter whom she sees? But I think she loves me; yes, I believe she loves me.’

He thought she loved him. He had some justification for so thinking, undoubtedly. The girl was of a confiding affectionate disposition, and was deeply grateful to these friends who had given her a home. Perhaps in her eagerness to prove her gratitude, in all the trivial ways that lay in her power, she may have been dangerously kind to her cousin, watching for every little opportunity of giving him pleasure, deferring to his wishes with a sweet childlike submission, going out to meet him with bright welcoming looks when he came home, making his life altogether bewilderingly happy, to the peril of his peace.

She was quite different to George Tolson. Philip saw the difference, and the fact of it added much to his happiness. To George her manner was reserved, singularly cold and distant, Philip thought; she took no pains to please him, and never betrayed any pleasure in his presence. No, there was no fear of George.

So the days and weeks drifted on, with a gentle monotony that would have been irksome to restless spirits; but Philip's life was a new life, and he wondered how he could ever have existed in a world unbrightened by Catherine Paroldi. Little by little,

she who had been unlovely at first grew to be most beautiful in his sight. The tawny hue of her skin faded in the cool English atmosphere, leaving her pale and fair, like a white lily. Her smile grew radiant as her spirits improved, and lighted up the pale face with a kind of glory, like the light in an old altar-piece, where it all comes from one divine face; a mere trick of art, perhaps, but with a lovely meaning in it.

Philip was in no hurry to urge his suit. His was a reserved nature, with much latent pride beneath a quiet manner. He watched her closely, and fancied himself secure of her love. He had only to speak when the fitting time came; she must know how much he loved her. In the mean while, all his dreams were of a future in which she was to be his wife. He could not think of himself for a moment apart from her. The possibility that this desire of his heart might be denied him never entered into his mind.

And so the time went on in the old house near the Tower with a profound peacefulness, George Tolson coming very often in the lengthening spring evenings, almost their only visitor. The three young people used to walk together of an evening in the

empty City streets sometimes, as the weather grew milder, Catherine arm-in-arm with her cousin, George Tolson walking by her side, expounding curious scraps of archæological lore about the churches and quaint old buildings of divers kinds hidden in the narrow streets and lanes by which they went.

So the time went on, until there came a sudden break in this monotonous life for Philip Rayner. His father insisted upon his going on a round among their customers in the north of England. There were details in the management of the trade that wanted revision and rearrangement. There had been numerous complaints of late from provincial customers; prices must be lowered to meet the march of the times. It was altogether a delicate business, requiring the exercise of commercial diplomacy, and necessitating, Samuel Rayner said, the presence of a principal.

He was surprised to find his son disinclined for the performance of this duty; anxious to delegate it to a clerk; in fact, anything rather than to go himself. But upon this point the old man was absolute. Roused by a threatened danger to his house, he showed himself as keen a man of business as in his best days. Rayner, Rayner, and Sons must show

themselves prompt to satisfy the demands of the times. His son Philip must go, and none other. So Philip went. It was only a business of a month or six weeks, yet he felt as if the very mainspring of his life was broken when he turned his back upon the familiar old house.

He never forgot that parting. He was to go by the night mail, and it was a calm airless evening early in May when he left his father's house. Catherine came to the hall-door to bid him good-bye. For the first time in his life he kissed her. Just at the last, when his portmanteau had been put on the roof of the cab, and the old butler was standing on the doorstep talking to the driver, Philip took his cousin in his arms, and kissed her on the lips. It was one long passionate kiss, and he fancied that it was at once the declaration and the seal of his love. She could not misunderstand him after that; she was his own from that moment.

Catherine Paroldi gave a little cry of astonishment or reproof, and ran back to the parlour. There was not a moment to lose. Philip sprang into the cab, and drove off. He saw her for an instant at the open window watching him, with the evening sun upon her face. That picture—the pale young face, the

shadowy eyes, and loose brown hair, framed in the window—haunted him all through the long night journey. The memory of that one unpremeditated kiss haunted him too, the seal which he had set upon his love.

The six weeks were dragged out into two months. People in the north were slow, and Philip Rayner had a great many places to visit. Having once undertaken the business, he was determined to do it thoroughly, and he found matters regulated themselves easily and pleasantly enough, by the exercise of his personal influence and a little judicious liberality. Altogether his mission was a successful one.

It was the end of June when he turned his face homewards; brilliant weather, and the country through which he went looking its fairest. But Philip Rayner did not think much of the verdant summer world through which he was travelling. His thoughts sped on before him to the end of his journey. How would she receive him, Catherine, his idol? With blushes and shy downcast looks? No, he scarcely thought that. There had been no blush upon the face that looked out at him from the open window. How would

she receive him, his darling, his own? Doubly his own from the moment in which he had pressed that passionate kiss upon her unresisting lips.

His only letters from home had been from her; dear little letters, telling him all the trivial news of the old house, his father's talk of him, the blank caused by his absence: sweet womanly letters, which a sister might have written to a brother. He never thought of that. To him they were the letters of his plighted wife.

For the last few days he had heard nothing. His movements just at the end had been uncertain. But he had no fear of evil, or that he should find any change in his dull peaceful home.

It was beginning to grow dusk when the cab drew up at the familiar door, with its carved wooden canopy of the William and Mary period, supported by two chubby-faced cherubs. Looking eagerly up at the old house, a great shock fell upon him. The blinds were all drawn closely down in the still summer evening. His first thought was of his father — his first thought was of the truth. The old man was dead.

The ancient butler opened the door, and received his new master with a solemn face — a face in which

there was real grief, for the man had loved his employer of so many years.

‘There never was a better master or a better man,’ he said, with something like a sob. ‘Yes, Mr. Philip, we’ve lost him. He fell down in a fit just after breakfast, though he’d read his newspaper and everything just the same as usual, and he never spoke again, poor dear gentleman. There was as many as four doctors with him at one time, for Miss Paroldi wouldn’t believe as there was no hope; but they could do nothing for him. There was a telegram sent to you at Sheffield the night before last. You got it, didn’t you, sir?’

‘No; I left Sheffield last week. I came here straight from Hull. Let me go to his room, Jackson; I should like to see him at once.’

‘He looks as calm as a sleeping baby, God bless him! I’m very glad you’ve come home, sir. There’s many things about the funeral we couldn’t settle without you. I told the undertaker I knew you’d have everything of the handsomest, but of course I could say no more than that.’

Philip went up-stairs to the solemn death-chamber, a long oak-panelled room, with four tall narrow windows, which had been gloomy enough even when

inhabited by the living. He had scarcely known until this moment how much he loved his father, or how bitter a blow their parting was to be. For the time, even the image of Catherine Paroldi was blotted from his mind. He stopped in that darkened room for a long while, nearly an hour, and then went slowly down-stairs in the deepening summer dusk. Day was not quite ended even yet, though the early stars were shining faintly through the long staircase window as he went down.

There was a lamp burning dimly in the hall. Catherine came out of the parlour, very pale, and dressed in black ; it was one of the black dresses she had worn in memory of her mother. She gave him her hand, looking at him with a grave pitying face.

‘I am so sorry for you, cousin Philip,’ she said ; ‘so sorry for my own sake, too. I loved him very dearly. Indeed, I had good reason to love him,’ she added, breaking down with a little choking sound.

They went into the parlour, and sat there in mournful silence till very late, only saying a few words now and then. On the next day Catherine told Philip all about his father’s last moments, about that last breakfast, too, when he had been quite himself, and had talked as cheerfully as ever he had

done within her knowledge of him, speaking of his son's approaching return, and looking forward with evident pleasure to that event.

Two days afterwards came the funeral, a stately ceremonial ; for Philip Rayner chose this conventional mode of testifying to his respect for the dead man, as the only manner in which he could exhibit such a feeling to the eyes of the commonplace world in which his father had lived. The City churchyard wherein the Brothers Rayner lay buried had long been closed, so the old man's bones were carried to Norwood Cemetery, by and by to rest under a handsome monument.

It was with profound sadness in his heart that Philip rode homewards through the summer sunlight, and amidst the busy life of suburb and city, when all was over, and the dreary day's work done. No, all was not quite over. There was the will to be read, a ceremony which did not involve much anxiety or heartburning ; for Samuel Rayner had not many relatives, and those he left behind him were, with the exception of Catherine Paroldi, wealthy traders settled in remote colonies. There was no one but Philip and the two old servants, Mrs. Dorkin the housekeeper and Jackson the butler, to hear the reading of the

will, which was read with all due solemnity by the family solicitor, in the grim darksome dining-room, a spacious chamber only used on state occasions.

The will was an old one, dated six years ago, and worded in a very simple manner. The old man left an annuity to each of his faithful servants, a mourning ring or so to the distant traders, a small legacy to the doctor who had attended him for some thirty years of his life, and all the rest to his only son. There was nothing for Catherine Paroldi. The will had been executed before Samuel Rayner knew of the girl's existence, and there was no codicil.

It mattered very little, Philip thought. All that he had would be Catherine's. It was time for him now to speak plainly; the dear girl must not have an hour's doubt as to the security of her position. He would speak to her that very evening. There was no indecency, no lack of reverence for the dead, in such promptitude. Philip fancied that his marriage with Catherine would have been the desire of his father's heart. The old man must have surely foreseen their union, or he would never have left Catherine Marsh's daughter penniless.

The cousins sat alone together that evening, after

a dinner of which neither had eaten anything. It was a warm sunny midsummer evening, and the faint hum of the declining City life came to them through the open windows with a distant drowsy sound. The old house had that aspect of profound dulness peculiar to a habitation in the heart of a city on a summer evening, when mankind has a natural yearning for the sweet freedom of the hill-side, and for the green leaves in the woodland. Philip had no such yearning to-night, however. To him the shadowy oak-panelled room was paradise. He forgot that he had seen his kind old father laid in the grave that day; he could think of nothing but Catherine's pensive face as she sat by the open window, with the low western sunlight shining upon her, as it had shone on the evening when he kissed her. The words which he had to speak did not come to him very easily; he loved her too much to be over-bold. But in that last happy hour of his youth there was no shadow of doubt in his mind. He had never contemplated the possibility of a refusal on Catherine's part; he had never told himself that he might have a rival; he had never doubted that she loved him. In perfect faith he had accepted her grateful affection, her frank sisterly regard, as an earnest of the love that was to

be given when he pleaded for it. He was rather ashamed of himself for having been so backward in pleading, that was all.

‘Catherine,’ he said at last, drawing his chair nearer hers, ‘I have something to say to you.’

She had been working busily until this moment, but she laid aside her work as he spoke, and turned her calm pensive face towards him.

‘And I want to speak to you, cousin,’ she answered, blushing a bright rosy red all of a sudden. ‘There is something I have been wanting to say for the last three days, but I hadn’t the courage. And yet I know how good you are, and that nothing in the world could make you unkind to me.’

‘Surely not, my dear. Unkind to *you*, Catherine! How could I ever be that?’

‘Of course not; and that’s why it has been so foolish in me to feel afraid of speaking frankly. I think you must know how happy and peaceful my life has been in this dear old house, cousin Philip, and how grateful I must ever be to you and your dear father for all your goodness to me, but—but—we are both young, and it would not do for us to go on living here together. People would think it strange. Mrs. Dorkin told me as much a day or two ago—and the

evening after cousin Samuel's death I had the offer of a new home. Don't think me ungrateful, pray, cousin Philip, or that I want to run away from you. Indeed, I cannot fancy a sister loving her only brother better than I love you, but I must go away—every one says that.'

She looked at him just a little anxiously, the blush fading slowly away from the sweet face.

'A new home! Why should you go away, Catherine? What need you care if some malicious fool should slander us? It is hardly possible for malice to go so far as that; and it can matter so little to us, for—' And then, without finishing the sentence, he exclaimed, 'The offer of a new home, Catherine! What home?'

'Mrs. Tolson—George's mother—has asked me to stay with her till—till I am married.'

She was blushing again by this time, and the heavy lids drooped over the glorious dark eyes.

'Till you are married!'

'Yes, cousin Philip. I ought to have told you sooner, perhaps, but it happened while you were away, and it seemed such a stupid thing to write about, somehow. George Tolson has asked me to be his wife, and—and—I love him very dearly—and we

are to be married in a month or two. We shall not be rich, of course, for George has his mother to keep—that is his first duty—but we can live happily on a very little, we love each other so truly.’

The ghastly change in her cousin’s face stopped her suddenly in the midst of her innocent confession.

‘Cousin, dear cousin Philip,’ she exclaimed, ‘you are not angry?’

‘Angry!’ cried the young man; ‘you have broken my heart. What, didn’t you know that I loved you? didn’t you know that every hope I had was built upon the security of your love? When I kissed you that night I went away, if you had doubted before, could you doubt then what I felt for you?’

‘Indeed, Philip, I thought it was only a cousin’s kiss. We have been like brother and sister; I never dreamt you cared for me more than you might have cared for a sister.’

‘Of course not!’ Philip Rayner cried, with a bitter laugh. ‘What is easier than to say that? And he, the scoundrel, the traitor, the false friend I brought to this house, the sneaking villain who came into our firm a beggar—he to go behind my back and steal you!’

‘Stop, Philip! I cannot hear you say those things

of him. What right had he to suppose that you cared for me? It is too cruel, too unjust; dear cousin, be reasonable, be like yourself. Whatever sin I have committed against you has been done in ignorance. I shall never cease to be grateful to you; never cease to feel affectionately towards you. Be generous, cousin Philip; tell me that you forgive me.'

'Forgive you!' cried the man, in a blind fury. 'To the last hour of my life—if I live to be a hundred years old—I will never speak to you again! I pray God I may never see your face any more!'

And with those words upon his lips he went out of the room, went away from her, with a sullen determination to hate those two who had wronged him until the end of his days.

He left the house at once, and roamed away into the dreariest outskirt of the City, a desert tract where there were buildings newly begun, abandoned skeletons of houses, and a wide margin of brickfields. All the night through he rambled about this dismal region, with a fever in his brain, and no consciousness of fatigue, no consciousness even of the scene around him. If any one had told him he had been walking on the shore by some roaring sea, he could only by

circumstantial evidence have perceived the falsehood involved in the assertion.

It was in the broad summer sunshine that he went home ; his clothes whitened with dust and stained with the night dews, his face wan and haggard. Labourers going to their work in the early morning stopped to stare at him as he passed them. One of the sour-faced maid-servants was cleaning the doorstep when he went in, and gazed at him aghast, but he scarcely saw her. He washed himself and changed his clothes with a half-mechanical sense of the proprieties, and then went down to that every-day parlour which had a little while ago seemed to him such a pleasant home-like room. There was a solitary-looking breakfast-table laid for one ; and instead of Catherine Paroldi's presence there was a little note addressed to Philip Rayner ; a tender pleading little letter, assuring him once again of her gratitude for his goodness to a friendless orphan, beseeching him once more to be generous and forgiving, and telling him that, let him act towards her as he would, she would never cease to be his grateful and affectionate Catherine.

He read the letter three times with a fierce hungry look in his face, a rage of mingled hate and love, then

crushed it in his hand and flung it into the empty grate. And having done that, he determined to recommence his life upon a new system ; to shut that false girl's image out of his mind, to devote all his energies and all his thoughts to business.

The first letter he wrote when he had seated himself at his desk in his private counting-house, for the first time since his journey, was a brief epistle to George Tolson, informing him that his services were no longer required, and that if he preferred any pecuniary compensation instead of the ordinary term of notice, such a course would be more agreeable to the feelings of his obedient servant, Philip Rayner.

The answer to this was prompt enough. It told the new chief of Rayner, Rayner, and Sons, that Mr. Tolson required neither notice nor compensation, and that he should have quitted the office for ever before his note could be delivered to Mr. Rayner.

'He will find another situation, I suppose,' Philip said to himself, 'for the scoundrel is clever. He had a hundred and fifty a year with us ; he will scarcely get so much elsewhere. At best it can only be genteel beggary, a perpetual struggle for bare existence. And what is there that I could have denied her if

she had married me? She will think of that sometimes, surely.'

How far Philip Rayner succeeded in shutting out the image of the girl he had loved was best known to himself. From the hour on which he left her on the night of his father's funeral he never spoke of her again to any human creature. Whatever curiosity he may have felt as to her fate, he kept locked in his own breast, making no attempt to discover what became of her.

It was from this time forth that he spoke of himself as a good hater. He had a kind of sullen pride in his hatred of George Tolson and Catherine Paroldi. And yet, as it has been said before, he would, no doubt, have called himself a Christian. He had always been a good man of business; but from the hour of his disappointment he devoted himself to the dryasdust labours of his daily life with a new energy. His father had left him a rich man, and every year added to his wealth, while his expenses diminished instead of increasing. The faithful butler retired to live upon his savings and his dead master's legacy in a congenial retreat beyond Wapping, and Philip made no attempt to supply his place. He was waited

upon after this by the middle-aged housemaid, who had amassed money in the savings-bank, and acquired some distinction in a community of Primitive Methodists, whose place of worship was in a darksome lane near the East-India Docks. He was quite content with this reduction of his former state. It was a means of saving money, and he had a stolid satisfaction in the accumulation of his wealth.

The years passed, and he lived on, without change of any kind, in the dull old City house. Friends he had none. The only man he had ever made a companion was George Tolson. Acquaintances of course he had in the way of business — people who thought well of him, and would fain have had him for a guest at their houses ; but he refused all invitations. The gloomy solitude of the old house near the Tower best suited his gloomy humour. People asked him sometimes why he did not buy a place at Clapham or Dulwich or Norwood, and live more in accordance with his fortunes ; he always told them, with the same dreary smile, that he did not care for the country, he was fond of London. One day a bolder spirit than the rest asked him plainly why he had never married. The dark look with which Philip Rayner

answered the question put an effectual stop to all farther inquiries upon *that* head.

So his life went on, buying and selling, and daily growing richer ; coming home every day to the same lonely room ; eating and drinking sparingly in solitude ; sitting alone through the long evening, with a neglected book lying on the table before him, or wandering alone in the familiar streets and in the suburban roads that he had trodden long ago with George Tolson ; and for any pleasure or variety there was in his life, he might as well have been some wretched galley-slave, toiling under the sunshine of southern France. So the years went by, and brought him no tidings of those he hated, no mutation in his own monotonous life. It was ten years after she had left his house when he saw Catherine Paroldi, or Catherine Tolson, as, of course, she must be now. She flashed past him one winter's afternoon at dusk in a crowded City street, a tall slim figure, dressed in black, with great dark eyes and a wan face. It was only when she had passed him some moments that he knew, by the quickened beating of his heart, who it was that had been so near to him. He turned, and would fain have followed her, impelled by a strange curiosity to learn the circumstances of her life, but

she was lost in the crowd by the time he had recovered himself so far as to be able to look about for her.

Great heaven, how her face haunted him after that November twilight! She was poor—he was sure of that; he had read as much even in his brief glimpse of that wan face; poor and careworn, alone in the City street; jostled by the crowd, hurrying homeward to some sordid refuge; *she* for whom life should have been one bright holiday, had she chosen to be his wife. He laughed aloud as he thought of his money, and the home he could have given her. Not that dull City mansion which served well enough for him, but a suburban palace set in a fairyland of gardens, carriages, lackeys, diamonds to crown the pale brow. O God, how different life might have been for both of them had she but loved him! He hated her with a double hatred as he thought of what they had each lost; hated her for the wrong done to herself as well as for the wrong done to him.

He took out his bank-book that night, the modest parchment-bound volume in which a prosperous trader is apt to find a more soothing influence than in the brightest dreams of poets or the most profound philosophising of sages. Yes, a loose thousand or two

had accumulated since he had last taken a survey of his affairs; a little more to invest in some safe and profitable way, in India bonds or unimpeachable railway debentures. A couple of thousand pounds! and that poor pinched face of hers had looked as if a ten-pound note would have been a boon to her.

'I never thought that George Tolson would succeed in life,' Philip Rayner said to himself that night; 'he was too volatile. Clever, I admit, but with that sort of superficial cleverness which seldom helps a man to make a fortune.'

From that time forward the face that had flashed past him in the crowded street was always with him. She had haunted him before in her girlish grace and beauty; she came before him now like the sad shadow of some wandering soul in Hades, and still he told himself that he hated her. What was her poverty to him? If she had been on her knees before him pleading for help, he would have been as deaf as stone to her prayers. She had chosen for herself; let her abide the issue.

It was more than a year after this when he saw the man who had once been his friend, George Tolson. The two men met at an obscure street corner near the Royal Exchange, Philip returning from an

agreeable visit to his stockbroker's, the other emerging suddenly from a public-house, a gaunt shabby figure, with a haggard unshaven face.

A faint flush lit up the careworn face as the man recognised the son of his old employer, and he made as if he would have spoken to him; but Philip Rayner brushed past him and hurried on, very pale, and with a dark forbidding countenance. No, there was nothing but hatred in his heart for this man. George Tolson looked after him, irresolute, for a minute or so, then gave a heavy sigh, and walked slowly on. Whatever vague hope might have impelled him to approach that sometime friend died out at sight of the pale angry face.

Thus Philip Rayner twice lost the opportunity of discovering the fate of these two people who had once been so much to him.

And yet there were times when he would have given the world to know how they fared; whether they had drained the cup of misfortune to the very dregs, and whether Catherine repented the sacrifice she had made. Do what he would, work as hard as he would, he could not banish her from his thoughts. The contemplation of his own prosperity was a pleasant thing enough, but her sad face came between

him and that image of the golden calf which he had set up for himself. Was he sorry for her? No, surely not. He was not made of the stuff to forgive such a wrong as he had suffered. He was a good hater.

Another year had gone, and Philip Rayner was forty years of age. It was his birthday; a dull sunless day late in October, with a cruel easterly wind blowing all day long. Rather a dreary occasion a birthday for a man who stands quite alone in the world. No one congratulated Philip Rayner upon this completion of another year in his life, not even his servants, for he had long ago dropped all ceremonial on such anniversaries, and no bottle of wine was opened in the kitchen for the drinking of the master's health. He was a man who abjured all sentiment, and yet his loneliness, his utter isolation, did strike him just a little painfully on this particular day. And it must needs be always so, for all the years to come. He had not a friend in the world. He might live forty years more, and see forty more such birthdays, in the same dull old house, in the same death-like silence and solitude. For the first time he felt as if those grim panelled walls were horrible to him. They seemed to close in upon him

like the walls of a vault. He started up from his fireside in a sudden paroxysm of despondency, and hurried out of the house. Once in the open air it mattered to him nothing where he went. The clocks were striking seven, and the traffic of the day was for the most part over. He had the streets almost to himself. It was a supreme relief to him to have left that silent shadowy parlour, always haunted now by the ghost of what once had been, and to be out under the open sky. He walked on, careless where he went; crossed London-bridge, and made his way far out by obscure streets and bye-roads till he found himself in a dismal neighbourhood beyond Walworth—a bleak barren outskirt, where there was a ghastly patch of waste ground that had once been a common, hemmed in by shabby streets of new-built houses, the greater part of which seemed to be still untenanted.

The exploration of these sordid streets afforded some kind of amusement to Philip Rayner. Perhaps it was pleasant to him to contrast the squalor which prevailed in this small obscure world, making itself manifest in a hundred trivial ways, with his own prosperous condition. If he had no one else to wish him joy upon his birthday, he could at least congratu-

tulate himself upon his wealth, and wonder how these people endured the burden of their existence; he who, an hour ago, had rushed out of his comfortable home, unable to bear the sudden agony of its solitude, the thought of all the monotonous joyless years that he was to live in it.

The dwellers in this region were, at least, not lonely. Wherever he caught a glimpse of a lighted room, he saw a family group assembled. He heard children's voices here and there through open doors, or a couple of matrons gossiping sociably on a doorstep. These wretched creatures seemed almost happy in spite of their poverty. It gave him an angry feeling to think that it was so; that so little was needed for happiness, and that he had missed it.

He turned presently into a darker and lonelier street than the rest, where there were more empty houses and an air of desolation more profound than anything he had seen elsewhere. Yet the houses were better and larger than those in the neighbourhood, with little bits of garden ground before them.

Here all was so silent that Philip Rayner could hear the low suppressed sobbing of a child who stood on the opposite side of the road, looking down at something on the ground, with clasped hands, a

humble image of despair. He was not a hard-hearted man in a general way, and could not witness a child's distress quite unmoved. He crossed the street quickly, and went up to the child. She was a small delicate-looking girl, with an air of shabby gentility, and a pale thoughtful little face; a girl who might have been any age from eight to twelve.

'What is the matter, my child?' Philip asked kindly.

'The medicine, sir; the medicine for mamma,' the girl answered, still looking down at the ground, where Philip now perceived the relics of a broken bottle. 'It is very particular, and very dear. I had to fetch it from the chemist's, and it slipped out of my hand somehow just as I was close to home, and yet I meant to be so careful. O dear, dear, dear, what can I do?'

'Why, leave off crying, to be sure, my little maiden, and get another bottle of medicine. That is the best thing to be done.'

'But the money, sir. I oughtn't to say such things to a stranger, but it was the last there was in the house. There's no more. Mamma will have to go without the medicine, and she's so very, very ill.'

'That she shall not, little one. Come back to the

chemist with me, and I'll find plenty of money for him.'

'O, will you really, sir? How good, how very good!'

The girl clasped her hands, and looked up at him with a rapturous face. They were standing just under the solitary lamp of the street. What was it in the little one's face that moved him with a sudden thrill? Something, a look, an air, that brought back another face, seldom absent from him now. And yet there was no special likeness between those two faces. The girl's eyes were blue, her hair a pale auburn. It was in expression alone that she could resemble Catherine Paroldi in the decline of her beauty. But the expression was there — a pleading piteous look that went straight to his heart. And he had no reason to steel his mind against this child. He might indulge the fanciful feeling which that vague something in her looks had awakened in him; he might be kind to this poor waif and stray, without any derogation from the dignity of his hate.

It was rather a long walk to the high road where the chemist lived, and he had plenty of time to study the little creature who walked so patiently beside him, looking up in his face and answering all his

questions with a meek gratitude that touched him profoundly. It was so small a thing that he was doing; a matter of a couple of shillings, perhaps, at most. How friendless the poor must needs be, when such a trifling service seemed so much to them!

The girl was eleven years old, the eldest of the family. There were three other little ones at home, two girls and a boy. Papa's name was Turner. He had been very unfortunate, could not get a situation in the City, and was earning a very little now by writing for some obscure newspaper. He was very clever, the child said, but not so good as mamma. And poor mamma had felt all the trouble so much, and it had made her very ill. It was her heart, the doctor said.

All this the little girl told him with childish frankness, and yet with the womanly tone of a child whom hard experience has made older than her years. They found the chemist's shop still open, had the prescription made up again, and then Philip Rayner, loth to lose sight of the little girl just yet, or to leave her unprotected in the streets, went back with her. She entreated him earnestly not to put himself out of his way on her account. She was quite accustomed to be out as late as that, she said; but he would take no denial, and went home with her, impelled

by a strange curiosity to see the place where she lived.

She led him into the parlour, a bare wretched-looking room, though it was clean, and there had evidently been some feeble attempt to make things comfortable. The furniture was of the scantiest and the shabbiest—a rickety-looking Pembroke table, and three or four dilapidated cane chairs. That was all. An unkempt servant-maid, a mere girl of fifteen or so, emerged from the back premises as they went into the little passage, carrying a tallow candle, by the light of which Philip Rayner took his first survey of the parlour. It seemed as if the child divined the meaning of that look.

‘It’s not our furniture,’ she said; ‘that was taken away for the rent, more than a month ago. Some kind neighbours lent us these things, and the landlord lets us stay till the house is let; when it is, we must go.’

‘What a time you’ve been, Miss Mary!’ exclaimed the servant, looking rather curiously at the unknown visitor. ‘Your mar has been frightened about you.’

‘I had an accident with the medicine, Sally. I shouldn’t have been able to bring any at all, but for this gentleman’s kindness.’

The unkempt handmaiden, who was evidently of a soft-hearted nature, threw up her hands and stared at the stranger with goggle-eyed admiration.

‘It’s not many friends you’ve got, poor child, goodness knows,’ she said. ‘It’s well there’s some can feel for you.’

‘And mamma?’ asked the little girl eagerly. ‘Has she been better while I’ve been away, Sally?’

‘She’s been very quiet,’ the servant answered dubiously, ‘but you know she’s always that. Complaints never pass her lips.’

‘And have the children slept?’

‘Like tops, Miss Mary. I only wished you’d been in bed along of ’em, as you ought to be at your age.’

‘Yes,’ responded Philip; ‘it’s late for this poor child to be about, and she seems a fragile little creature.’

‘Ah, sir,’ replied the servant, with a groan, ‘if you knew what that child goes through, and how patient she is, and what a head she has, beyond her years! She’s kep the house together somehow, when things must all have gone to ruin but for her. And as to me—there, I haven’t had a halfpenny for wages or beer-money for the last six months, and

have hard words besides from master when he's out of sorts. But, lor, I haven't got the heart to leave *her*.'

'No, no, Sally dear, you couldn't leave me,' said the child, clinging to her.

Philip Rayner looked down at them, wondering at them and at this new glimpse of life. The child was such a little lady in the midst of her poverty, had such an air of grace and refinement in her premature womanliness, that he was more interested in her than he could have believed it possible for him to be in a creature so far away from himself. He stood looking down at her, wondering what he could best do to help her, and as shy and awkward as if he had found himself suddenly in the presence of a duchess.

'I shall come back to-morrow evening to inquire how your mamma is, Miss Turner,' he said, 'if you have no objection.'

'O, no, no, indeed ; I am so grateful to you.'

Then he shuffled out of the place somehow, contriving as he departed to slip a half-sovereign into the palm of the slipshod handmaiden. He had a notion that anything given to the servant would be for the general benefit, and he could not, for the life

of him, have offered money to the child, although she had so freely confessed their poverty.

He thought of her many times next day in the midst of his business, and at dusk drove to the house in a cab, carrying all manner of small luxuries which he fancied might be of use to the invalid; a hamper containing half-a-dozen bottles of the choicest wine in his cellar, a basket of rare hot-house grapes, a package of superfine tea, some tin cases of preserved soup. This sensation of doing something personally for the good of another was quite a new feeling to him, and seemed to give a zest to his life. Perhaps he had felt the utter loneliness and uselessness of his long blank evenings more than he had ever confessed to himself.

He was not content even with taking these things to the invalid; but catching sight of a gay-looking fancy repository on his way through the Borough, stopped the cab and alighted to buy a glittering work-box for his little favourite. It might not be of much use to her, but it would please her; he was sure of that.

He found the parlour very neat and clean, a little bit of fire burning brightly in the small grate, and Mary Turner at work by the light of one tall candle,

which made her look very small. He was evidently expected, and she flushed with pleasure when the maid announced him as 'the strange gentleman.'

But what was this compared with her rapture when she saw the treasures he had brought her! The wine—

'O sir,' she cried with clasped hands, 'the doctor has said so often that mamma ought to have wine, and we *could* not give it to her. You are like an angel come down from heaven!'

And then the fruit, big purple grapes, with a powdery bloom upon them; and then the tea. Poor mamma was so fond of tea; it was the only thing she really did care for, and the tea they got in that neighbourhood was so bad, and often they had been obliged to go without any. How should she ever thank him enough? she asked in her delight.

'I don't want any thanks. It is a great pleasure to me to be able to do this small service for you. I would do much more, believe me.'

He stayed there some time; saw her open one of the wine-bottles deftly—they had first to send to a neighbour to borrow a corkscrew—and fill a glass with the rich golden-hued Madeira, and then place a plate with a few grapes on a little tray beside it, to

carry up-stairs to her mother. He waited to hear how mamma had taken the wine—it had been great work to make her drink it all, it was so strong and good—and how she had admired the grapes; and how she thanked him for his goodness with all her heart. And then he gave Mary her workbox, and saw her blue eyes opened to their widest as she admired the precious mother-of-pearl fittings, and the dainty quilted blue silk.

‘You couldn’t have given me a better present,’ she said. ‘I have a great deal of work to do, for I make all the things for my little brothers and sisters.’

She might better have said she mended all the things, for there was much more mending than making to be done in that establishment.

‘What have I done to deserve such kindness from you?’ she exclaimed, gazing at her open workbox in a rapture of contentment.

‘You have encountered misfortune nobly,’ he answered.

She looked at him wonderingly; it seemed such a strange thing to her to be praised and rewarded for doing what it was so natural for her to do.

Before he left her, he contrived to ascertain the address of the landlord, and called upon him before

going home that night. The man was a small publican in the neighbourhood, and gave Mr. Rayner the history of his tenants readily enough.

They had occupied his house nearly two years, and had paid their rent pretty well for the first twelve months, but after that had got altogether behind-hand, so that he had been obliged to send in a broker and sell them up.

‘But after I’d done it, I hadn’t the heart to turn them out, sir,’ said the landlord. ‘That child, the eldest girl—a slip of a creature, but with a woman’s spirit in her bit of a body—begged and prayed of me, and the mother was ill, and so on, and I let ’em stay. I haven’t even made an attempt to let the house, though I told the girl they must go when it is let. The mother’s a good soul, I believe, and worked at her needle like a galley-slave till she fell ill. The father isn’t much good; an idle scoundrel, I fancy. He was clerk somewhere in the City when they took the house, but he lost his situation somehow a year ago, and now he’s on some newspaper, not earning much over a pound a week. There’s no margin for a man to pay back debts in that.’

No, Philip Rayner was fain to confess that there is not much margin for anything in a pound a week,

after food and raiment for a family have been provided out of it. What was he to do for these people? It was all very well to indulge his sympathetic feeling for the little girl, but he did not want to do anything quixotic, or to burden himself with the maintenance of an unknown pauper household for the rest of his days. He wanted to be prudent, and yet to help them.

‘I don’t think you’ll lose by your kindness in the long-run,’ he said to the landlord. ‘I shouldn’t like these people to be turned adrift, not while the mother’s ill, at any rate; and I should be glad to pay you a quarter’s rent in advance, dating from to-night, to secure them three months’ shelter, leaving the arrears *in statu quo*.’

‘That’s kindly, sir,’ answered the man, ‘and I’m agreeable.’

So Philip Rayner paid him something over a five-pound note, and took a formal receipt for a quarter’s rent of 11 Belvidere-street, East Walworth.

As he drove home that night, he remembered the existence of some spare furniture stowed away in a lumber room at the top of his house: substantial old-fashioned stuff, good old bedding, some faded damask curtains, excellent in its way but superannuated, and

put aside some fifty years ago, when the best bedrooms had been refurnished in the unlovely fashion of the Regency. He was up in this lumber room at daybreak, making a selection from these stores, and on his way to the office ordered a carman he sometimes employed to take the things he had chosen to Belvidere-street that afternoon, but, as he valued Mr. Rayner's custom and good-will, the man was to be sure and hold his tongue as to where and whom the things came from.

'I want to help some people in reduced circumstances, and don't want to give them a claim on me in the future,' he said; 'you are man of the world enough to understand that, I'm sure, Potts.'

When Philip Rayner went to Walworth in the evening—and it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world for him to go there—he found the parlour made quite splendid by means of those superannuated chairs and tables which he had found in the lumber room. Mary and the faithful Sally had been busy ever since the goods arrived, arranging and rearranging. There was a long narrow couch by the fireplace, a couch of strictly classic form, and the hardest thing imaginable in couches; but to Mary's fancy, upholsterer never devised anything more ele-

gant or more luxurious. There was a solid table instead of the rickety Pembroke, a comfortable square arm-chair for papa to sit in of a morning when he wrote.

'The curtains are up in mamma's room,' cried Mary; 'they make it so warm and comfortable, and there were such draughts before. Of course the things come from you; I have not even wondered about them. It's like the story of Aladdin, and you are the genius of the lamp.'

He stayed with her for two hours or more that evening, hearing her half-childish, half-womanly talk about this furniture. It was a delight to her to tell him her little old-fashioned arrangements; it was a delight to him to listen. Discovering by chance that the devoted Sally was in the habit of spending her evenings with her young mistress, there being no fire in the kitchen, and that apartment being moreover pervaded by a peculiarly audacious species of black-beetle, which made nothing of human presence, but rioted at its pleasure after nightfall, he insisted that his visits should cause no alteration in this custom. Upon which, with much hesitation, Sally was induced to appear, and took her seat by the farthest corner of the table, provided with something rather formidable in the way of needlework.

‘You see, papa is never at home of an evening,’ Mary said, in explanation of this arrangement. ‘He is obliged to be at the newspaper office every night.’

And then she went on to tell Philip how grateful her father was for his goodness, and how glad he should be to have any opportunity of thanking him in person, which kind of demonstration Philip Rayner, who was by reason of his lonely habits one of the shyest of men, was religiously determined to escape. If he had not been secure of finding Mary alone of an evening, his visits to Belvidere-street would have speedily ceased.

But Mary was always alone, and he came night after night. He had begun even to wonder what he should do with his evenings when there was no longer any excuse for his coming. Very rarely did he appear empty-handed, and he exhibited a marvellous ingenuity in the judicious selection and variety of his offerings. The younger children had been presented to him, and he catered for their small wants with an almost childlike delight in childish things. It was so new to him to be interested in any human creature, so new for him to live out of himself. But he never gave Mary money. It seemed to him that to do that would have been to vulgarise their friendship.

He slipped a liberal donation into the servant's hand from time to time, and he could see, by the increased comfort and order of all things in the house, that his gifts were employed, as he had fancied they would be, for the general good.

Of course he heard a great deal about Mrs. Turner as his intimacy with Mary increased—how nobly she had borne their poverty, how patiently she had worked, now giving music or singing lessons for the small recompense to be obtained in a poor locality, now toiling incessantly at her needle. She was very clever, the girl said, and papa too, and yet they had found it so hard to live. He heard all about her slow progress from a state of utter prostration towards recovery, and how hopeful the doctor was now—the kind doctor who had a great practice in the Camberwell-road, and yet came to them three times a week without any fee. And so the time went on till Philip had known Mary more than a month, and Mrs. Turner was now strong enough to sit up a little in the early part of every day, and would soon be able to come down-stairs.

‘And when she does come down you will let her thank you, won’t you?’ the child pleaded. ‘You won’t avoid her as you have avoided papa.’ It was a

hard thing for Philip Rayner to say yes, but the child seemed to have set her heart upon this business, and he could not refuse to please her.

‘I don’t want any thanks, my dear,’ he said; ‘what I have done has been done for my own pleasure. But—but if you really wish it, I shall be happy to see your mamma.’

In all this time he had never told Mary his name or abode. If he had been indeed the genius of the lamp, she would have known as much about his worldly circumstances as she knew now—nor had the child ever evinced the faintest curiosity. It seemed her nature to be a lady.

At last the important day came. Mamma was well enough to spend an afternoon down-stairs. There was to be a little tea-drinking in honour of the event, and Philip Rayner had consented to come much earlier than usual in order to assist at this ceremonial. He had to leave business before his usual time, and to go without his dinner, in order to do this; but he thought nothing of those small sacrifices. He felt nothing but a sense of shyness in being presented to a stranger whom he had benefited.

He found Mary watching for him at the garden-gate, bleak and cold as the weather was, without

shawl or bonnet, and with her pale auburn hair blowing in the wintry wind. She clapped her hands joyfully when she saw him.

‘Everything is ready,’ she said, ‘and the parlour looks so nice, mamma won’t know it. She’ll think the fairies have been really at work. Come and see. She’s not down yet, but is to come down in a few minutes.’

Yes, the parlour looked very snug and comfortable. Such a ruddy little fire; such sparkling tea-things, Britannia metal polished till it was brighter than most people’s silver; and muffins and marmalade, and unheard-of luxuries of that kind, and an all-pervading odour of tea and toast. The inexorable classic sofa was wheeled close to the fire ready for mamma; papa was not at home—that newspaper absorbed a great deal of his time.

Philip Rayner took his seat where Mary told him, in the post of honour opposite the invalid’s sofa. Her radiant joyous face moved him deeply. To think that such small things could give so much happiness, and that he had missed it. That was always the burden of his thoughts at such times. He sat where she placed him, waiting for the convalescent’s appearance.

Presently there came the sound of a light feeble step upon the stairs, then the faint rustling of a woman's dress, and then the door was opened softly, and a lady came in. Tall, and slim, and pale, with great dark eyes.

He started to his feet with a loud cry :

‘Catherine!’

Yes, it was she; not the bright Catherine of his youth, but the wan faded woman who had flashed past him in the City street—faded, and yet most beautiful to him in the wreck of her loveliness—the woman he had sworn to hate, whose face he had prayed God he never might look upon again.

She echoed his cry faintly, and tottered a few paces forwards as if she would have fallen at his feet; but he caught her in his arms, and held her to his breast, looking down at her with a tender smile.

‘Catherine,’ he said, ‘do you remember the first time I kissed you? Once more, my love, only once more,’ and he pressed his lips upon the pale careworn forehead. ‘There was selfish passion in that first kiss. Remorse and forgiveness are in this.’

After this there came explanations; and she told her cousin of the evil days that had fallen upon her since her marriage, and how, in the last place where

they lived, they had been so deeply in debt and so utterly unable to pay, that they had been fain to leave by stealth, and to enter a new neighbourhood under an assumed name, lest their creditors should follow them. There were no words needed to tell how bitter this had been to the woman's honourable mind, or how the man's character had deteriorated before it came to this. She spoke of him with unvarying love and gentleness, but she did not pretend that he had been blameless.

'I think he might have done better if he had had one friend to help him,' she said plaintively; 'but he had none. We were quite friendless.'

'He shall have a friend in future,' Philip answered promptly; 'he shall come back to my office. He has formed bad habits, perhaps; never mind, Catherine, we will cure him of them. It was I who turned him adrift. I owe him an atonement. His debts shall be paid, and he shall come to me on better terms than when he left the firm; and you, and Mary, and the little ones, must have a pretty cottage farther away, somewhere in the country, where my sweet pale lily will blossom into a rose.'

He laid his hand tenderly upon the child's head.

‘My darling,’ he said, ‘I think my love for you has made me a new man.’

Nor did his love for her change. She was always the delight of his life; and in the days to come, Mary Tolson became a great heiress, the beloved adopted daughter of that man whose favourite boast had been that he was ‘a good hater.’

THE DREADED GUEST

A **BLEAK** December night nearly a hundred years ago. Hard frost, and a keen biting wind blowing the snowflakes into the faces of those few foot-passengers who still tramp the half-deserted City streets; a frost so hard, that the fast-falling snow does not change to mud and slush all in a moment, after the usual manner of London snow, but lies crisp and white upon road and pavement, and crowns the steep roofs and gables with mountainous heaps of whiteness, which overhang the parapets, and threaten pedestrians with the fall of miniature avalanches.

There are retired nooks and corners of this crowded London city where the snow might lie almost as pure and undefiled as in some silent Alpine gorge known only to the eagle and the chamois—notably one narrow little street, scarcely better than a court or alley, in the region of Moorfields; an eminently respectable street in its way, tenanted by two or three

working jewellers, a Dutch merchant in some small way of trade, the chief clerk in a great colonial house under the shadow of the monument, and Dr. Prestwitch.

One feeble oil-lamp glimmers at the entrance to this quiet little street—which leads nowhere, by the way, Dr. Prestwitch's house facing the explorer, and barring his farther progress, except through Dr. Prestwitch's hall-door—one dim blear-eyed little lamp, which does not do much towards the illumination of the street in a general way. But to-night there is the lightness and brightness of the snow, which lies thick upon the paved footway between the two rows of tall narrow houses, unmarked by a single footfall. The occupants of Little Bell-street are a sober steady-going people, and there has been no traffic, not so much as the opening or shutting of a door, since eight o'clock this evening.

It is now eleven.

As an auxiliary to the public lamp, Dr. Prestwitch burns a little coloured lamp of his own under the wooden shell that surmounts his doorway—a relic of former splendour, when great people lived in the City, and fashionable bachelors or small gentry with large pretensions may have occupied Little Bell-

street; a lamp which announces his profession to the world at large, keeps him in the eye of the public as it were, and which has more than once brought him a chance patient—some ruffian bruised and mangled in a street-fight, a child run over in a neighbouring thoroughfare, a black eye, or a sprained ankle.

There is one tall narrow window upon each side of Dr. Prestwitch's tall narrow door, and in the extreme left corner of Dr. Prestwitch's house there is a passage, scarcely wide enough to admit one person of bulky figure, leading to Dr. Prestwitch's back premises—the surgery where he compounds his medicines and spreads his plasters, and a bleak bare room, with a long deal table on tressels, and a smaller leaden-topped table fitted with a sink. This room is very rarely used by the doctor, never entered by the doctor's family, and has a mouldy odour.

In the time of this December snow-storm Dr. Prestwitch was quite a young man; a young man with a bright eager face, dark curling hair, which he did not often disguise with powder and pomatum, and a bright eager manner; a man who had given hostages to Fortune in the shape of a pretty little wife and three small children, and who was perhaps rather

too anxious to succeed in life. It is doubtful whether this young surgeon had any legal right to the title of doctor, but the neighbourhood of Little Bell-street had made him a doctor by common consent. The brass plate upon his stout oak door described him simply as 'Mr. Prestwitch, Surgeon.'

He had not a large practice, and the task of supporting that small household was a hard one, simple as were the needs of the pretty little wife and the three small children. They had one servant, a fat over-grown girl, with a shock of red hair, and a countenance in which good temper did duty for all other charms; a stupid honest creature, who heartily loved the doctor's wife and children, and thought the doctor himself the greatest man of his age. The daily meals in that respectable house in Little Bell-street were apt to be meagre in quantity and inferior in quality; but Barbara Snaffles—commonly called Bab—was a faithful soul, who would have shared the diet of Count Ugolino and his sons without a murmur, if fidelity had demanded such patience. As it was, she had a fair share of whatever was eaten or drunken in the house, and was treated more like a member of the family than was perhaps consistent with the dignity of a professional man's household.

On this particular December night she was sitting darning stockings upon one side of the hearth in the every-day parlour—a small panelled chamber, furnished in the scantiest way, but with a certain air of neatness and even comfort nevertheless—while her mistress occupied the other. A handful of fire burnt cheerily in the old-fashioned grate—such a roomy old grate, with such a capacity for the consumption of fuel, but pinched and contracted by an artful contrivance of brickwork upon each side. The red-worsted curtains, a trifle scanty even for the narrow window, but very comfortable-looking notwithstanding, had been drawn to their extremest stretch; the honest mahogany table had been vigorously polished by Bab after the removal of the tea-things; the one candle was kept carefully snuffed; the cat reposed luxuriously against the open-work side of the bright brass fender; and this room, altogether humble as it was, bore the unmistakable aspect of home.

The doctor was in his surgery reading. He was a studious young man, and in the dearth of more profitable employment devoted his evenings to the study of medical science. It had been a matter of no small regret to him that he had been unable to advance very far in the practical study of that branch of his

profession which seemed to him the most important, the study of anatomy. The cost of a subject for his experiments rendered this part of his science almost a sealed book to the poor and hardworking student, who could not afford to avail himself of the services of those gangs of desperate ruffians who were continually violating the sanctity of the grave by their unholy traffic.

Martin Prestwitch had a friend, however, in the house-surgeon of Newgate, and that gentleman, who had a surfeit of subjects sometimes, had promised to send him the first defunct criminal he should be able to dispose of in a friend's favour. There were outstanding claims to be considered first, for the jail was in those days the only legitimate resource for the student; but whenever there should be a subject *to spare*, it was to be for Martin Prestwitch.

He had been reading hard in an old book upon anatomy this evening, and his fingers itched to be using the scalpel.

'I'm afraid Jack Tylney has forgotten his promise,' he said presently, with a sigh.

He was wrong. Mr. Tylney, the Newgate surgeon, had not forgotten the obligation that was upon him. His promise was destined to be kept that very

night. The first footsteps to defile the snow that had remained untrodden through all the quiet evening hours were the footsteps of two men carrying a ghastly burden.

They took it first to the hall-door, where one of them stooped to read the name upon the brass plate, and then knocked—a cautious, mysterious-sounding knock.

The door was opened almost immediately by the faithful Barbara, who scented a possible patient in this untimely summons; but at the sight of that ghastly burden—it was muffled in a sack, but there are some things that will not be hidden—she fell back with a start.

‘Lord save us! what’s that?’ she cried.

‘A subject for Dr. Prestwitch—the man that was hung for coining at Newgate this morning.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Bab, ‘do you mean to say it’s a dead body?’

‘Yes, miss,’ one of the bearers answered, with a grin; ‘not to make too many bones about it, it’s a stiff un—with Mr. Tylney’s compliments to Dr. Prestwitch.’

‘Take the dreadful thing round to the surgery,’ said Barbara, aghast. ‘Master’s in there reading.’

Take it down that passage ; I'll come and open the door directly minute.—And to think that any one can wish to have such a thing !' she ejaculated, as she shut the front door.

She had heard her master talk of that subject which Jack Tylney was to send him.

She opened the surgery-door and told the doctor what had come for him, and then opened the door leading into the passage, where the men were waiting. Martin Prestwitch was all on the alert in a moment. He took his candle, led the way into that damp-smelling room set apart for such a purpose as this, and so rarely used. The horror was carried in there, and laid upon the long deal table, Barbara Snaffles standing on the threshold all the time and peering in, fascinated by the ghastly sight. Then Martin Prestwitch and the men came out, and the doctor dismissed them with a shilling to buy drink—one of his few shillings.

He locked the door of his dissecting-room, while Barbara stood a little aloof, open-mouthed, devouring the scene with her big round eyes.

'Ask your mistress to make me some of her good coffee, Bab,' said the doctor—'I shall sit up late to-night ; and be sure she knows nothing of

this business,' he added, pointing to the locked door.

'Lord bless you! no, sir; not for the world. I don't want to turn that poor dear's whole mask of blood, as mine was turned just now when I saw that orful thing in a sack.'

Barbara gave a gulp and made a wry face as she spoke.

'You'd better come and say good-night to missus, sir, if you want her to go to bed.'

'Ay, to be sure,' answered Martin Prestwitch, at all times an affectionate husband, but just at this moment somewhat distracted by the thought of that inanimate clay lying upon his table.

He went into the parlour, where his industrious little wife was singing softly to herself, as she put the finishing touches to a triumph of ingenuity and economics in the shape of a frock for the biggest of the three small children, made out of a cast-off petticoat of her own.

'See, Martin,' she cried, looking up at him with her bright loving face, 'won't Molly look nice in that?'

'Very nice, dear; but you oughtn't to sit up so late, sewing for Molly. It's nearly twelve o'clock.'

'That's the very last stitch, Martin; and it's just

as late for you, sir, as it is for me ; and you've not had a morsel of supper either. There's the bit of beef-steak pudding that was left at dinner. Bab has warmed it nicely, and there it is, waiting for you, down in the fender.'

'I'll eat it by and by, dear ; but I've no appetite for supper just yet. I want you to make me a cup of coffee—as strong as you like.'

'What, Martin ! you're not going to sit up over your fusty old books again ?' cried the little wife dolefully.

It was a common thing for the doctor to sit poring over his medical books deep into the night, and Mary Prestwitch had often crept down-stairs in the gray morning, to find him still studying one of those dismal volumes, with his candle burned down to the socket.

'Yes, Mary, my dear ; I want to sit up an hour or so longer. There's a very interesting case I'm reading up, a case that will be useful to me in my practice ; and you know, love, how much depends upon my getting on in my profession.'

Mary gave a little nod and a sigh. Yes, indeed, it was vital to that small household that the surgeon's efforts should be crowned with success. Only that

evening, Mrs. Prestwitch and Bab had been calculating the amount of the Christmas bills—Christmas brings so little for struggling householders except bills—and wondering whether the tradespeople would be content with such small sums as Dr. Prestwitch could give them, on account.

‘They know that we are honest, Bab,’ said the anxious wife; ‘thank Heaven they know that. We have lived in this house five years, and paid our way somehow. I don’t think they will find it in their hearts to be hard upon us.’

Martin Prestwitch kissed his wife, and sent her off to bed directly she had made the coffee; during which operation there was heard a great clattering of bolts and bars from the indefatigable Barbara, who took as much pains to secure all these fastenings as if her master’s house had been the most tempting field for an enterprising burglar. It was just midnight when the little woman tripped up-stairs, with Barbara behind her, and all the clocks of the City seemed to be booming out the hour as Dr. Prestwitch went to his dissecting-room, carrying a steaming jug of coffee in one hand and a candle in the other. He had to put his jug on the floor while he unlocked the door, for there were no superfluous tables or side-

boards in the passages of that sparsely-furnished abode. The room struck cold as some icebound region on that bleak winter night, and the doctor's first labour was to light a fire. There were happily some wood and coals in a cupboard near the fireplace, and with these and an old newspaper Martin Prestwitch set to work. The task was not an easy one; the grate was damp, the smoke came down the chimney, and well-nigh choked him; but the doctor's patience and energy got the better of these difficulties, and when he rose from his kneeling position before the dingy hearth the fire was burning cheerily.

He refreshed himself with a cup of coffee before proceeding to his more serious labour, and set the jug down upon the hearth, to keep the remainder of that comfortable beverage warm. Then he set to work in real earnest.

There is no need to enter upon the details of that ghastly performance. Before he had reached more than the preliminary stage of his labour, Dr. Prestwitch came to a full stop, suddenly, with the knife in his hand, arrested by a conviction that had come upon him like a flash of lightning, and set his heart beating with an awful fear.

Another moment, one rapid movement of that

skilful hand which held the knife, and he might have been a murderer.

The creature was not dead !

Martin Prestwitch bent down with his ear against the felon's naked chest, and listened.

Yes, there it was, weak and suppressed, but still palpable to the professional ear—the action of the heart.

In the next moment the doctor was at work with the approved means of those days for the revival of suspended animation. It was a slow business, but he was rewarded at last. The coiner gave a great sigh, muttered something that sounded like an oath, and then opened his bloodshot eyes, and stared with a bewildered gaze at his benefactor, the man who had given him back his forfeited life.

‘Where the — am I?’ he asked; ‘I thought they were going to hang me. Was there a reprieve?’

‘No, there was no reprieve. Mr. Ketch must have bungled over his work, I suppose.’

The coiner sat upright, and looked about him; and at this moment it occurred to Martin Prestwitch that he had perhaps been guilty of a kind of felony in giving back life to a man whom the law had doomed to death. The law was a critical thing in

those days, involving such a large amount of capital punishment, that Dr. Prestwitch was by no means sure that such an act as assisting in a felon's evasion of the gallows might not be in itself a hanging matter.

But the deed was done ; and there sat the coiner, a stalwart square-built ruffian of near six feet high, a man who could have annihilated the slim surgeon.

'Can't you give a man something to drink?' asked the coiner. 'My throat's like a lime-kiln.'

Dr. Prestwitch handed him the coffee-jug, which he emptied at a draught.

'Cat-lap!' said the coiner contemptuously ; 'but it's done me good. And now, do you mean to tell me as they hung me this morning? I remember standing on the drop, and feeling the sleet and hail pelting against the blessed night-cap they'd pulled over my face ; and I think, of all the blessed cold days I can call to mind, this blessed morning was the coldest. Do you mean to tell me as they made a botch of it, and let me off?'

'So it appears,' replied Dr. Prestwitch gently ; for although a man of some moral courage, he felt himself at a disadvantage in this tête-à-tête,—'so it appears. All I know is that you were brought here about an hour ago, and introduced to my notice as

an individual who had paid the last penalty of the law.'

'Brought here? What for?'

'Well—for—in short, for scientific purposes. My name is Prestwitch, and I am a professor of medicine and surgery.'

'WHAT!' roared the restored sufferer; 'were you going to cut me up?' The coiner looked so ferocious as he asked this question, that Dr. Prestwitch felt as if his last moment had come.

'Don't excite yourself, my good friend,' he remonstrated mildly. 'If things had been as I had every reason to suppose, you would not have felt the slightest inconvenience. The legitimate ends of science would have been promoted without any suffering on your part. How much happier would you have been in that respect than the dogs and rabbits, whose vivisection has served to demonstrate the theories of some of our great anatomists! As it is, however, you have some reason to be grateful to me, as you owe me your life.'

Dr. Prestwitch glanced towards the door, thinking there was no real necessity that this interview should be prolonged farther, and that this terrible guest of his might be going. Then, all at once, it

dawned upon him that there was an obstacle to the coiner's departure. With the exception of the sacking that had muffled him when he was brought to Little Bell-street, he was garmentless ; and the sacking was scarcely a costume for a cold winter's night in the streets of London.

'Grateful!' muttered the man. 'I don't know as life's much of a favour to a poor devil that doesn't know where to get a mossel of bread ; that's marked down by a pack of bloodhounds, and if he doesn't get hung to-day, is pretty safe to get hung to-morrow. You can't give me back my tools, I suppose? I had as pretty a set of moulds and presses as was ever seen, in a cellar down by Lambeth Pallis, for my business, which was a good un till a pal peached upon me. Howsomedever, I make no doubt you meant kindly, and here's my hand upon it.'

With that the scoundrel extended a dingy-looking paw, very broad and muscular the doctor observed, and Martin Prestwitch was fain to accept the friendly invitation, and shake hands with the coiner.

'And now, doctor,' said the man, wrapping the sacking round him as closely as he could, and planting himself in the single chair by the fire, which he stirred in a manner that showed no mercy to the

doctor's coals,—‘and now, doctor, since we begin to understand each other, I’ll trouble you for something to eat. I had some breakfast at six o’clock this morning—for I wasn’t a-going to be put off my feed by Jack Ketch—but I’ve had nothing since.’

‘I’ll go and see,’ said Dr. Prestwitch doubtfully, knowing the slender resources of his larder.

He remembered the beefsteak-pudding, which had been put aside for his own supper, and which he could gladly have eaten just now, and he presently returned to the dissecting-room with this savoury mess, and a great hunch of bread and a slice of cheese. The coiner devoured these, and then looked about him with the air of a man who could have eaten half an ox or so, and to whom this light refreshment seemed about as substantial as a handful of lollipops.

‘You haven’t got any more of that there puddin’, I suppose?’ he asked rather dolefully.

‘Not a morsel.’

‘Nor a slice of cold beef, or anything in that way?’

‘I am sorry to say there is no cold joint in the house.’

‘And I’m sorry to hear it. You ain’t out of bread and cheese, though, I daresay; and I must make up

with that. So if you'll bring me the loaf and the cheese, I shall be thankful. Don't take the trouble to cut it. It ain't likely as a gentleman such as you would be able to take the measure of *my* appetite.'

Dr. Prestwitch sighed as he went away to comply with this request, distressed to think how bare a look the larder would have next morning at breakfast-time. The quartern loaf was shrunk already, the family cheese was only the remnant of a pale-complexioned specimen of the Dutch kind; but it was impossible to refuse submission to the demands of such a guest! So Martin Prestwitch carried these provisions to the coiner, and laid them on the table before him, with a plate and knife.

'Your house don't seem to be too well supplied with victuals, doctor,' said the man, eyeing the pale-faced Dutchman with no special favour.

'I am not a rich man,' Martin Prestwitch answered humbly. 'I find it a hard thing to live.'

'Humph!' muttered the coiner; 'that's a common complaint, I suppose. I've had my ups and downs—the fat of the land to-day, and a dry crust to-morrow; and now I've got to begin life again, with the brand of the law upon me, every man's hand against me, and no more mercy to expect from any of 'em than if

I was a hunted rat. I should like to know how I'm to set about getting my living when I leave this house to-morrow morning.'

Dr. Prestwitch breathed a little more freely. It was some relief to him to learn that this unexpected visitor did contemplate departing in the morning. What a blessed thing it would be to have him gone ! It seemed to the perplexed surgeon as if the burden of this nameless criminal's presence had been weighing him down for months.

The coiner made a fierce dart at the pale cheese, and hewed alternate wedges from that and the loaf, in a half-absent manner, until both were demolished, grumbling to himself the while about the hardness of life, when a poor creature might not manufacture a few guineas for his own use and maintenance, without becoming liable to the stiffest penalties of the law.

'And how I'm to begin work again, with all my tools gone, and not a pal as I can trust in, is more than I know,' muttered the coiner audibly.

'I really think, my good friend,' Dr. Prestwitch suggested gently, 'that in your case I should emigrate. A foreign country—a new country especially, like Nova Scotia—might offer a fair field for—' Dr. Prestwitch did not like to say 'coining,' but con-

cluded with a polite periphrasis—‘your particular line of business.’

‘Emigrate!’ exclaimed the coiner contemptuously. ‘How the deuce’—his actual expression was considerably more forcible; but Dr. Prestwitch, who was always a mild man, used to tell this story in the mildest language, only hinting that his guest’s vocabulary had been something beyond the common in the way of rude vernacular vigour—‘how the deuce is a man to emigrate who hasn’t sixpence towards his passage-money? And a nice outfit I’ve got for emigration!’ added the coiner, with a shiver, looking down at the sacking in which he was hugging his burly limbs. ‘If you want me to emigrate, doctor, you must find the rhino.’

‘I!’ cried Martin Prestwitch, turning a shade paler, though he had been pale enough before. ‘My good man, what are you dreaming of?’

‘Yes, *you*; you brought me back to life, and you’re bound to provide for me. I didn’t ask you to come any of your reviving dodges over me, did I? I was brought here to be dissected, and it was your duty to dissect me. But you scientific parties are never satisfied without trying your blessed experiments!’

‘Good gracious me!’ exclaimed Dr. Prestwitch, completely confounded by this blatant ingratitude. ‘Here is an extraordinary creature! I restore him to life, and he looks upon me as his enemy!’

‘I didn’t ask to be restored, did I?’ grumbled the coiner. ‘Life’s no favour to such as me! Howsome-dever, you’ve revived me, and now you must keep me going; and in the first place, I’ll trouble you for a suit of clothes.’

‘A suit of clothes!’ murmured the surgeon in a helpless tone.

‘Yes. I can’t walk about like this; it’s against the laws.’

‘I have not an extensive wardrobe,’ said Martin Prestwitch; ‘and even if I had, my garments would scarcely fit you.’

‘Well, you are but a poor thread-paper of a man, certainly,’ answered the coiner, who had perhaps devoured more beef in a week than the surgeon was in the habit of consuming in a quarter; ‘but any clothes are better than none, and I must screw myself into ’em somehow; so turn ’em out, Mr. Doctor.’

‘Good gracious me!’ exclaimed Dr. Prestwitch again dolefully; ‘it’s like an awful dream.’

He went away to do his visitor’s bidding. It did

really seem to him almost as if he had been walking in his sleep, the victim of some gruesome vision. A cold perspiration bedewed his forehead as he crept up-stairs, candle in hand, to search for garments wherewith to clothe that midnight intruder.

He chose the biggest things he could find—a bottle-green riding-coat with a fur collar, that had belonged to his father (a good and substantial garment, which he had cherished with care, intending to have it cut down and adapted for his own wear on some convenient occasion). It went to his heart to part with this treasure, and he felt the fineness of the cloth with a slow regretful hand, as he flung the garment over his arm. He found a pair of leather knee-breeches that had belonged to the same esteemed parent—a bulkier man than himself—and with these, a clean linen shirt, and a rusty black brocaded waistcoat of his own garnished with copper lace, he went down-stairs.

‘I can only *lend* you the coat,’ he said, as he laid the garments before the coiner; ‘the breeches and waistcoat you are welcome to keep.’

The unknown looked at the things with a somewhat contemptuous expression of countenance, and then proceeded to invest himself in them, splitting

the shirt-sleeves with his brawny arms, and straining the leathern breeches of the defunct Prestwitch senior with his ponderous legs. The waistcoat he split up the back with a knife, and laced up the opening dexterously with a bit of whipcord which the doctor procured for him. The coat fitted him comfortably, and concealed all deficiencies; but even then there remained his extremities still unclad—his great bare feet and muscular legs—for which Martin Prestwitch must needs find shoes and stockings. With that bottle-green coat and fur collar the man was too well dressed to go out barefoot.

‘As soon as the shops are open, I’ll slip out and buy you a pair of shoes and stockings,’ said the doctor; ‘but for mercy’s sake, man, keep quiet while I’m gone. I wouldn’t have my wife know of your being in the house for worlds.’

‘I’ll keep quiet enough,’ growled the coiner. ‘These togs are no great shakes; but I feel myself more like a Christian in ’em than I felt in that old sack; and, I say, doctor, you’ll give me a trifle of money to set me going again, won’t you?’

‘Money!’ exclaimed Martin Prestwitch. ‘Why, my good creature, I’m as poor as a church mouse!’

‘Come, that won’t do,’ said the coiner. ‘You

doctors make no end of money, helping your patients out of this world. It's only fair you should spend a little on a patient that you've helped *into* the world.'

The doctor again urged his poverty, but it was no use. His arguments, however reasonable, prevailed nothing against that direful visitant.

'It's no good humbugging, doctor,' said the man. 'I don't leave this house without a fi'-pun note.'

It did happen that Martin Prestwitch possessed the sum of seven pounds ten, amassed by what supreme efforts of economy he and his narrow household only could have told, and honestly set aside for the payment of the Christmas quarter's rent. To part with any of this would be like shedding his heart's blood; but he felt himself utterly unable to cope with this dreadful creature, whom he had given back to the living world; and if the coiner had asked him for his heart's blood instead of a five-pound note, it seemed to Martin Prestwitch that he must needs have given it.

So, after a longish parley, and a desperate endeavour to defend his treasure on the doctor's part, Martin Prestwitch stole up-stairs once more in the dead night-time, and crept like a robber to his little hoard, from which he took the five-pound note de-

manded by his tormentor. He looked at a little Dutch clock in the kitchen before he went back to the dissecting-room—watch he had none—and saw that it wanted still a quarter to three o'clock. The long dismal winter's night was not half gone yet, and Dr. Prestwitch did not know how much more that resuscitated felon might ask of him before it was done. To think of going to bed was worse than idle; sleep or rest was an impossibility with that baleful creature upon the premises. Dr. Prestwitch seated himself by the fire opposite his visitor, and prepared to wait for morning with what patience he might.

Fed and clothed, the intruder was inclined to be social, and expanded considerably as the night wore on, favouring Dr. Prestwitch with numerous glimpses of his past history, exhibiting a career at once adventurous and felonious. Sense of right and wrong seemed altogether wanting to this creature, whose real name, he told the doctor, was Jonathan Blinker, but who had been known to fame by several aliases, the most familiar of which was Captain Flashman.

Day dawned at length—a dull gray winter's morning, the atmosphere heavy with unfallen snow, the bright white ground looking even whiter than it was

against the dense leaden sky. When the little Dutch clock in the kitchen struck seven, Martin Prestwitch turned the key of the dissecting-room door, and conjured Mr. Blinker to keep silence ; and for one whole hour the two men sat without speaking, Mr. Blinker dozing by the expiring fire, the surgeon listening to Barbara Snaffles's movements as she bustled about, performing her morning duties. Then came the shrill small voices of the children, and then his wife's gentle tones inquiring for the doctor at the dissecting-room door.

' You don't mind being locked in here for half an hour or so, while I go and get those shoes and stockings, do you ?' asked Martin of Mr. Blinker, in a whisper.

The coiner looked at him doubtfully.

' You ain't going to sell me, are you ?' he said. ' You wouldn't go and peach upon a poor devil that you've brought back to life ? You won't let me swing a second time for the sake of the reward ?'

' Do you take me for a scoundrel ?' exclaimed Martin, with suppressed indignation.

' No, I don't, and I'll trust you,' answered the other promptly.

So Dr. Prestwitch went out, and locked the door

behind him, to secure his secret from the exploring eyes of Barbara Snaffles.

He had to answer his wife's remonstrances and tender upbraidings. How could he sit up all night, to the peril of his precious health? He told her that his studies had been especially interesting, and the night had slipped away unawares.

'What! didn't it seem long, Martin,' she exclaimed, 'all those hours down in that cold dreary room?'

'No, indeed, my love; I never was more comfortable,' answered the doctor, with audacious mendacity.

'You eat a good supper, anyhow, sir,' said the familiar Barbara. 'Only think, mum; there isn't a mossel of yesterday's quartern, and the Dutch cheese is clean gone!'

Martin Prestwitch slunk off without attempting an answer to this accusation. He muttered something about seeing a patient in the next street, put on his hat, and went out.

It would not do to trifle with Mr. Blinker. The shops must be open by this time, and the coiner might be shod and dispatched. The doctor cheapened a pair of roomy second-hand shoes on a cobbler's

stall, and bought a pair of comfortable worsted stockings, of the size which his anatomical eye taught him was likely to suit Mr. Blinker. The half-hour had scarcely expired when he turned the key in the dissecting-room door. The coiner was asleep, with his head reposing comfortably upon the operating-table.

The shoes and stockings were an admirable fit; and when Dr. Prestwitch had farther provided an old hat, Mr. Blinker presented a tolerably respectable appearance. There was still the question of disguise; but the doctor, after some little search in his surgery, found a pair of green spectacles, which made a considerable alteration in Jonathan Blinker's physiognomy. When these had been assumed, the doctor looked out, saw that the ground was clear, that no inquisitive Barbara or anxious wife was lurking in the shadow of an adjacent doorway, and then ushered Mr. Blinker into the court, rejoiced beyond all measure to be rid of him, even at the cost of a five-pound note and that excellent bottle-green coat.

On the threshold Mr. Blinker turned round.

'I shall give you a look-in soon, doctor, to tell you how I get on.'

'O, don't, if you please,' the surgeon cried pite-

ously. 'It would never do for you to come here. You see, my family look upon you in the light of a body, and I don't see how they are to be brought to regard you from any other point of view.'

'I sha'n't come to see your family,' replied Jonathan Blinker; 'I shall come to see you.'

With this awful threat he stalked away, looking gigantic in the narrow alley. The doctor closed the door with a groan, and went to the parlour, where the meagre breakfast was neatly laid on the round table by the small bright fire, and where the anxious wife was ready to take alarm at Martin's haggard face.

But Mary Prestwitch's anxious looks were not half so embarrassing as the searching glances of Barbara Snaffles, who regarded the surgeon with a morbid curiosity, as a man who had just left an abnormal employment. She lingered in the room while he ate his breakfast, handing him his coffee-cup and hovering over his solitary egg.

'Is *it* there still?' she asked him in a stage whisper, while Mrs. Prestwitch was engaged with the three hungry children, the youngest of which was still dependent upon the maternal breast for the most primitive kind of nourishment.

‘What do you mean by *it*?’ Dr. Prestwitch asked impatiently.

‘Him! The body.’

‘No, girl; it’s gone.’

‘Gone? What! you’ve done with it already?’

‘Yes.’

‘And they’ve fetched it away?’

‘Yes, they’ve fetched it away.’

‘Well, I never!’ exclaimed Barbara, with an injured air; ‘they must have been in a hurry. I thought I should have seen it this morning. I’ve seen a many in my time—drowned and otherwise—and I never missed one before. I make no doubt I shall dream of him.’

‘Dream of him? Nonsense, girl!’

‘Not having seen him, I make no doubt I shall dream of him,’ said Barbara, with an air of conviction. ‘I never missed one before—not if it was three streets off and the family as it belonged to a’most strangers to me; and to have had one in the same house, and not seen him, seems right-down stupid-like.’

‘Good gracious me!’ cried the doctor; ‘the girl is a perfect vampire!’

‘Was it them two as brought him as fetched him away?’ Miss Snaffles inquired curiously.

‘Of course,’ answered the doctor.

‘And are they going to bury him in Newgate?’

‘I suppose so. There, Bab, go and mind your work, and don’t worry me any more about the man. He’s gone; that’s enough for you.’

Heartily did Martin Prestwitch wish that his visitor of last night had indeed been carried away to be safely interred within the prison-walls. That farewell threat of Jonathan Blinker’s weighed heavy on his soul.

For the first time since he had lived in Little Bell-street, Dr. Prestwitch was behind-hand with his Christmas rent, to the bewilderment of his faithful wife, who had helped him to save the seven pounds ten so carefully scraped together against the landlord should claim his due.

‘It’s gone, Mary,’ the doctor said dismally, ‘or at least five pounds ten out of it. You see, my dear, I was obliged to part with it.’

‘But what for, Martin? What could you want five pounds ten for? — you, who never spend money?’

'Surgical instruments, my love; a man's first duty is to his profession.'

And again Martin Prestwitch hated himself for having lied to the wife of his bosom.

The landlord was displeased but not implacable. Dr. Prestwitch was a careful tenant, and had shown himself an honest man; so, after grumbling a little, the landlord gave him a month's grace, and went his way.

Jonathan Blinker kept his promise. In the wintry gloaming a great hulking man in a bottle-green coat with a fur collar might have been often seen entering the doctor's surgery from the narrow side-alley, with a furtive surreptitious air. Here Dr. Prestwitch held converse with him, and was fain to provide some small sum of money against his coming. In time these donations took the form of a weekly allowance, and the accomplished Captain Flashman became a regular pensioner upon the doctor. He always used the same argument when claiming this bounty—Dr. Prestwitch had revived him of his own volition, and was therefore bound to aliment him—to keep him 'going,' as the Captain called it.

Dr. Prestwitch submitted to this imposition with

much bitterness of spirit, and many a groan breathed in the solitude of his surgery. He was a man of a gentle and somewhat timorous nature, and he felt himself unable to resist such a claimant; so week by week the struggling surgeon's brain was racked by the consideration of how he was to provide for Jonathan Blinker. Nor was it money only that his tormentor demanded from him. The ex-coiner was of a hungry temperament, and took it in bad part if there was not some trifling snack provided for him when he paid his weekly visit; whereby the surgeon was fain to have recourse to divers small stratagems in order to set aside the remains of a beefsteak-pie or to secure the bladebone of a shoulder of mutton for the refectation of his oppressor. The devoted Barbara did not fail to note the disappearance of these viands, and to remark upon the fitfulness of her master's appetite.

For a long time this secret burden weighed Martin Prestwitch down to the dust. Life had been a hard struggle before, but it was infinitely harder now, when the small weekly scrapings which he might have saved were absorbed by the omnivorous Blinker. He woke sometimes in the dead of the night, startled from sleep by the memory of his tor-

mentor, and lay broad awake for hours, brooding over his difficulties.

Mr. Blinker had taken care to impress upon him that the thing he had done was against the law, and that he was liable to some severe penalty for having assisted in the evasion of a condemned felon. Being too benevolent a man to betray his incubus, and not valorous enough to face the difficulties of the case, Dr. Prestwitch submitted to be imposed upon, and received his pensioner as meekly as if Jonathan Blinker had been a creditor armed with a righteous claim against him.

Things went on in this dismal manner for some time, and then there came a gradual change for the better in the doctor's circumstances. Patients dropped in upon him or sent for him much oftener than of old. Now it was a summons to attend the birth of some denizen of a slum in St. Giles's, anon he was called to the deathbed of some ancient inhabitant of the Mint; sometimes he was sent for to repair the damages caused by a faction-fight in the purlieus of Field-lane, or to operate upon the fractured ribs of some muscular member of the dangerous classes in Bedfordbury. On all these occasions he found that he had been recommended by Jonathan Blinker, who

had described him as a perfect master of surgery and physic; and on all these occasions Dr. Prestwitch had reason to suspect that his new clients belonged to the criminal classes. But patients are patients, and these people paid the doctor promptly and liberally when flush of money, and showed themselves honourable whenever he gave them credit. The juvenile population in these quarters was perpetually being increased; and the ladies being uniformly pleased with gentle Martin Prestwitch, one matron recommended him to another, until the gentleman who was usually described amongst them as 'Blinker's doctor' found his practice was really picking up, and his financial position becoming easier.

There were still, however, those dreaded visits of Jonathan Blinker; and it seemed to Dr. Prestwitch as if his whole life was pervaded by that bulky figure in the bottle-green coat, very shiny about the cuffs and elbows, and very mangy as to the fur collar, by this time. And yet he felt that, on the whole, he was bound to be grateful to his tormentor, for the ultimate result of the business had been advantageous to himself. He did even try to make some show of gratitude; while Jonathan on his part was positively affectionate to his benefactor, declaring himself ready

to serve him in any manner, at the hazard of a second suspension *per col.* even.

‘There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you, doctor,’ he said. ‘I’d coin for you if I had a new set of tools, or the money to buy ’em. There!’

The doctor, of course, entreated him to dismiss all ideas of coining from his brain, and to set about leading an honest life; but on this Mr. Blinker would only shake his head dubiously, as not perceiving the relevancy of the proposition.

So things went on for nearly three years. The doctor’s three small children had been recruited by an infantine brother, and now numbered four, with the possibility of a fifth looming in the distance. The doctor’s practice was better, but it was not a good one, and could not by any means be called an aristocratic or even a genteel practice; nor had the doctor any prospect of being able to remove to a more fashionable locality than Little Bell-street. He could pay the butcher and the baker, however, and had no need to worry himself about his rent; and this to a man of such modest desires was enough for contentment.

Mr. Blinker had been his pensioner all this time, and Barbara Snaffles had become quite familiar with

the weekly visitor in the bottle-green coat, dimly visible in the gloaming; for whatever the season of the year, Mr. Blinker came only in the twilight. She believed in him firmly as a patient in the corn-chandlery line—Dr. Prestwitch had told her he was a corn-chandler—afflicted with some chronic disease, and one of her master's most profitable customers.

The third year was closing in when the evening and hour of Mr. Blinker's accustomed visit came round without bringing that gentleman to Little Bell-street. It was the first time he had failed to appear with Tuesday evening's dusk since the foundation of this institution, and Dr. Prestwitch passed the remainder of the evening in a state of almost feverish restlessness, with the ex-coiner's allowance in his pocket. Could anything have happened to Jonathan Blinker? Could it be that this infliction had come to a sudden end?

A second Tuesday came round, and again Mr. Blinker was missing; a third, and then a fourth, with the same result. Dr. Prestwitch felt a wild half-guilty hope that he should never see Jonathan Blinker again. Yet he was somewhat sorry to think that evil had befallen the missing man, nevertheless;

For a few moments Dr. Prestwitch did indeed believe that some unknown benefactor had taken compassion upon his poverty, and that the glistening counters before him were genuine coin of the realm. Only for a few moments, and then the image of Jonathan Blinker arose before his dazzled eyes, and he felt assured that these bright reproductions of King George's image were the handiwork of the coiner.

He pushed away his wife's hand as she stretched it out to take one of the guineas.

'Don't excite yourself, Molly,' he said gently. 'It isn't real money. It's only some one playing off a practical joke upon me.'

'Not real money? O Martin!' exclaimed the wife, with something like a sob.

'No, my love. They look very well, certainly, but there's not a genuine guinea amongst them; and if you or I were to try to pass one of them, it would be at the hazard of our necks.'

'I wouldn't mind trying, though,' said the reckless Barbara, 'at Bartlemy Fair.'

'Bab, I'm ashamed of you!' cried the doctor.

He took up one of the delusive coins between his finger and thumb, and felt the edges with the air of a man learned in metallurgy.

‘Examine the milling, my dear,’ he said, handing the false guinea to his wife. ‘That is the test.’

Mary Prestwitch burst out crying as she looked at the bright simulacrum. It was a bitter disappointment. Five minutes ago she had fancied that a shower of riches had descended upon them; and now it seemed as if the thought of their poverty was a keener pang than it had ever been before.

‘Are they really false, Martin?’ she asked piteously.

‘As false as any that ever a man was hung for coining,’ replied the doctor.

He had just come upon a scrap of paper that lurked at the bottom of the box—a brief scrawl from Jonathan Blinker:

‘Honerd SIRR,’ wrote the felon, ‘I ave gott sum tooles and biggun wurk agen. I send a fu spessimints, wich may bee yusefull. Thay wold parse in y^e nayburode.—Y^{rs} to comand, J. B.’

Martin Prestwitch tossed this missive into the fire.

‘O Martin, who is it that has played this wicked trick?’ asked his wife; ‘and what was there in that note?’

‘Nothing that I could make out, Molly. Don’t fret, my darling. I don’t suppose the person meant unkindly.’

‘Not mean unkindly! And to disappoint us like that! O Martin!’

The Christmas snow lay in the retired nooks and byways of the great City once more, and the doctor was fourteen years older than at the beginning of this story. But he still lived in Little Bell-street, and still worked very hard to provide for his wife and children. The fact was, he had so many of them, that his household expenses for the last fourteen years had been steadily on the increase. He did not grumble at this, however. He could ill have spared one of that merry band.

His circumstances had improved somewhat year by year, but never so much as to justify his removal to a more fashionable neighbourhood. His patients belonged to the lower classes, and if he had left Little Bell-street he must have left his practice behind him. So a whole nosegay of blooming flowers had grown up in that dingy old house, more or less under the dominion of Barbara Snaffles. ‘Old servants are such hard masters,’ says Charles Reade,

and certainly Barbara ruled the doctor's household with a rod of iron.

There was a great commotion in the family this Christmas. The eldest girl, her mother's namesake Molly, was going to be married; going to be transplanted into a sphere of life much loftier than that in which her father and mother had their being, for she had been lucky enough to win the affections of a fashionable young doctor, whose father was a physician with a large West-end practice; a very proud and pompous gentleman, not a little disposed to consider that his only son was throwing himself away upon pretty Molly Prestwitch.

They were to be married upon the last day of the old year, and poor Molly had had hard work to prepare her simple wedding outfit, with the aid and counsel of Barbara Snaffles. Gentle little Mrs. Prestwitch was something of a cipher in the household, like most mild-tempered women whose lives are taken up with the rearing of children. She was content to look on and see the indefatigable Barbara manage for herself and her family, and it seemed to her that everything Mistress Snaffles did was wise.

On Christmas-day there was to be a great festival in Little Bell-street. Young Mr. Clemmory—Molly's

intended—was to dine with his future father-in-law ; and the great Dr. Clemmory himself, of Savile-row, had condescended to accept Martin Prestwitch's invitation to partake of his modest Christmas fare. The fare was to be by no means unworthy of the distinguished guest, however ; for Barbara had been up to her eyes in preparations for the last week, and had cheapened one of the finest geese in Leadenhall-market for the feast, which, with a haunch of mutton, a boiled round of beef, and a veal-pie, the doctor and his wife agreed would make a very pretty little dinner. They were to dine at three in the afternoon—quite a patrician hour—but young Clemmory had informed them that his father never dined earlier ; and as the appointed time drew near, Barbara's nervousness increased to a feverish intensity. She felt that her reputation as a cook and a manager was staked upon this cast.

A little before three Dr. Clemmory and his son arrived, the West-end physician a ponderous man, with a fat voice, a powdered wig, a pair of handsome legs in black-silk stockings, and a gold-headed cane. The small wainscoted parlour seemed hardly capacious enough for such grand company ; and Mrs.

Prestwitch was quite fluttered by the importance of her guest.

It was nearly dinner-time, and they were all assembled in the parlour: Molly the younger radiant and blooming in a white-muslin frock, with a coral necklace round her slender throat; two younger girls, who looked like smaller repetitions of Molly; three boys, more or less in the hobbledohoy stage of existence, all in clean shirt-frills, but showing a little more bony wrist below their coat-cuffs than was in accordance with the reigning fashion—poor people's children grow so fast. It was on the stroke of three; Mrs. Prestwitch was wondering how the goose would turn out; whether the haunch of mutton would be roasted to that perfection of culinary art which such a man as Dr. Clemmory had a right to expect in any joint set before him; and whether Barbara would emerge triumphantly from the plum-pudding ordeal, and walk unscathed through the mince-pie furnace. The house was small, and the narrow entrance-hall had been odorous with dinner for the last hour or more.

Before the neighbouring clocks began to strike the hour, there came a loud double-knock at Dr. Prestwitch's door. The surgeon and his wife started

and stared at each other aghast. They had invited no other guest ; and the advent of a dropper-in upon such an occasion would be an unmixed calamity. Every fork and spoon had been pressed into the service of the day, every inch of the dinner-table was engaged.

The West-end physician was laying down the law in his pompous voice, talking about the King, and my Lord North, and these contumacious Americans ; but every other tongue was silent, and Dr. and Mrs. Prestwitch were straining their ears to the utmost to hear the opening of the street-door, and Barbara's parley with the unexpected visitor. There was a long pause : it was not an easy thing for Bab to leave her dinner at the supreme moment of 'dishing up,' and it would have been ill-manners for a member of the family to leave the room in order to open the street-door. There was a prolonged pause, therefore, during which the church clocks chimed three with a solemn sound, and the individual who had knocked gave a loud husky h'm, a sound that sent a cold shiver through Martin Prestwitch, he scarce knew why.

At last the door was opened, and a voice that turned the surgeon's blood to ice was heard inquir-

ing for Dr. Prestwitch. Then a pair of creaking shoes walked down the passage, the parlour-door was flung open, and Barbara announced Mr. JONATHAN BLINKER!

It was the coiner, dressed in a bran-new bottle-green coat and breeches, and a scarlet waistcoat elaborately adorned with gold lace; the coiner grown stout and red-faced and prosperous-looking; the coiner in a snow-white frilled-shirt, and with a new hat under his arm.

There was a dead silence. Martin Prestwitch's countenance assumed a sickly hue; the great man from Savile-row stopped suddenly in his lecture, and stared at the new-comer, as if waiting for an introduction. Mrs. Prestwitch and the children stared also; but were inclined to consider Mr. Blinker's jovial red face in a favourable aspect. He looked an eminently respectable gentleman of the agricultural class.

'How d'ye do, doctor?' he said, unabashed by the assembly in which he found himself. 'I've just come back from America, and I thought I'd give you a look up before I went anywheres else, even though it was Christmas-day; and I don't mind cutting my Christmas beef with you, if you've no objections.'

What could Martin Prestwitch do—a weak soul at the best, and especially feeble where Jonathan Blinker was concerned? He faltered out a half-audible introduction, ‘Dr. Clemmory, Mr. Blinker; Mr. Clemmory, Mr. Blinker.’ The physician bowed with an urbane stateliness; good-natured George Clemmory shook hands with the stranger.

‘Your arrival is somewhat of a coincidence,’ said Dr. Clemmory; ‘we were discussing the aspect of American affairs when you knocked.’

Barbara announced dinner before Mr. Blinker could reply. By a rapid and judicious manœuvring of the knives and forks, she had contrived to prepare a cover for the uninvited guest; and the coiner took his place amongst the rest of the company to the horror of Martin Prestwitch, who knew not what revelations might be made before the meal was finished, and who felt that his face was palpably bedewed with cold perspiration.

The banquet was a success. Dr. Clemmory ate like an alderman, and praised the goose and the haunch until Barbara’s countenance glowed with an honourable pride. Mr. Blinker made himself eminently agreeable, talking jovially with the youngsters at his end of the table, and leading the laughter for

all Dr. Clemmory's jokes with a stentorian peal. It is true that he put his knife in his mouth a good deal, and supped up his gravy in a painfully audible manner; but people were not so refined in those days, and a prosperous agriculturist might do as much as this without creating a scandal. Altogether, things were much better than Martin Prestwitch had expected, and as the evening wore on he began to breathe more freely.

After dinner there was a dessert of nuts and oranges. How happy George Clemmory and pretty Molly Prestwitch seemed roasting chestnuts at the fire in the dimly-lighted parlour, with all those young brothers and sisters, while their parents conversed more gravely in the dining-room, where there was a steaming bowl of punch! Under the influence of punch, the West-end physician became wonderfully expansive, and patronised Jonathan Blinker in the most genial manner.

'I like a man of that stamp,' he said afterwards in confidence to Martin Prestwitch; 'an honest jovial fellow, cast in a good mould, sir, cast in a good mould. There's genuine metal there, Dr. Prestwitch; you can hear the ring of it. The man is sterling coin, sir.'

Martin Prestwitch shivered, and could only reply with a sickly smile.

Before the night was out Dr. Clemmory was obviously the worse or the better for liquor, and had become almost maudlin in his expressions of regard for the ex-coiner. Mr. Blinker had drunk more, but the strong drink had no effect upon him. When the physician's coach came to fetch him away from Little Bell-street, he volunteered to set Mr. Blinker down at his inn before driving home; an offer which was accepted, to the horror of Martin Prestwitch.

If Dr. Clemmory had taken a fancy to Mr. Blinker, that worthy, on his part, had taken a fancy to the junior members of the Prestwitch family. He insisted upon kissing the three girls under the mistletoe when he wished them good-night, and wound up by kissing Barbara Snaffles in the passage. He squeezed Martin Prestwitch by the hand upon the threshold, and said in a confidential voice,

'I think you've been glad to see me, doctor; and I take it kindly. I've not forgot past favours. I've made a bit of money out yonder in the shipping line, and I've left every penny of it to you.'

It was the truth; and the bit of money turned out to be a large fortune, which Dr. Prestwitch in-

herited three years afterwards from the grateful Blinker, who expired in the odour of sanctity at his own house at Clapton, sincerely regretted by the young Prestwitches, to whom he had been a kind of fairy god-father, showering benefits and gifts upon them during those concluding years of his life. To the last day of his existence Dr. Clemmory was wont to speak of Mr. Blinker as a model of probity, and the very flower of successful traders and self-made men.

**COLONEL BENYON'S
ENTANGLEMENT,**

CHAPTER I.

‘Thou see’st, we are not all alone unhappy :
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.’

It was late in July when Herbert Benyon, colonel of a Bengal cavalry regiment, landed at Southampton from one of the P. and O. steamers, home from India on sick-leave. The Colonel had been very ill indeed with jungle fever; very close to the shadowy boundary which divides us from that unknown country whither we are all journeying with steady footsteps on the separate roads of life. The fresh sea-breezes and idle steamboat life had done a good deal for him, but he still bore the traces of that desperate sickness. The sunburnt face was wan and haggard, and there were lines of premature age about the mouth and dark shadows under the large lustrous gray eyes. Those eyes of Colonel Benyon’s had been wont to strike terror to the souls of defaulting sol-

diers, conscious of a deficiency in the way of pipe-clay or a laxity as to drill; the gray seemed to change to black when the Colonel was angry, and at such times his men were apt to say that their commanding officer looked a very devil. He was not exactly a martinet either, and was known to be as particular about the comfort and well-being of his soldiers as he was about their appearance on parade; but he was a hard master, and his men feared him.

The Colonel gave a sigh, which was the next thing to a groan, as the express from Southampton slackened its pace at Waterloo. He had a first-class carriage all to himself, and had littered all the seats with an accumulation of newspapers, despatch-boxes, dressing-bags, and such light luggage. He had flung himself about the narrow space, like some restless lion in its den, during that rapid journey; had taken up one newspaper after another, and tossed it aside again with an air of weariness nigh unto death. And now, at the end of his journey, during which he had seemed devoured by impatience, he groaned aloud from very heaviness of spirit.

He was nine-and-thirty years of age, something over six feet in height, broad-shouldered, strong-limbed, and, if not exactly handsome, at least dis-

tinguished-looking ; his military career had been one continued success, and the men who knew him best prophesied for him distinction in the future. He had been eleven years away from England, and had passed through the fiery furnace of the Indian Mutiny, reaping a harvest of laurels from that most bloody field. And now he came home with two years' furlough, a handsome balance at his English bankers', and not a creature in the world with a claim upon his purse or his care.

A more thoroughly independent man than Herbert Benyon never landed upon British soil. He had escaped the rocks and shoals of matrimony by what his brother officers called a fluke. In plain words, he had been jilted at the outset of his career by a high-born and penniless flirt, who had thrown him over at the last moment in favour of a wealthier suitor. In all outward seeming he had borne his disappointment gaily enough ; but from that hour he became as a man hewn out of granite in relation to all womanly fascinations. The prettiest girls in Calcutta, the most dangerous young matrons in the Indian military world, had flashed their brightest glances upon him with no more effect than the rising sun has nowadays on the head of Memnon. He

was one of the best waltzers in English India, and was wont to declare that waltzing was an intellectual exercise ; but in all the giddy mazes of a dozen seasons, Colonel Benyon had never been known to entangle himself. There were women who were said to have been, in the graceful phraseology of the junior officers, 'down any amount of a pit,' or 'up no end of a tree,' on the subject of the Colonel ; but the Colonel himself had never been known to smile upon a woman with anything warmer than the conventional smile demanded of him by society, since the hour when Lady Julia Dursay had written to tell him that she had looked into her own heart, and found that it was better for both of them that they should break an engagement which could never result in happiness to either.

He had taken life pleasantly enough withal, and was eminently popular among his brother officers : a great billiard-player, a most implacable and inscrutable opponent at the whist-table ; and a mighty hunter of those larger animals which enliven the jungle by their existence. He had sent home innumerable tiger-claws mounted on silver, as labels for his English friends' decanters, and had more skins of wild beasts than he knew what to do with.

Indeed, Herbert Benyon excelled in all those accomplishments which win a man the respect of his fellow-men, and the admiration of the softer sex.

He was rich as well as successful. A bachelor-uncle had died during his absence in the East, leaving him a considerable fortune, and a fine old place in the north of Scotland. It would have seemed as if a man could scarcely desire more good things than had fallen to the lot of Herbert Benyon; and yet the man was not happy. Coming home to familiar scenes after those eleven years of exile, awoke no thrill of rapture in his heart. He had, perhaps, no enthusiastic affection for the country of his birth; in any case his return brought him no pleasure, only a gloomy sense of his own isolation.

Near relatives he had none: neither sister nor brother would smile a welcome upon him; his father and mother had been dead twenty years. He had some distant kindred, of course—men and women who bore his name, and who professed a certain amount of affection for him; and he had friends by the score—the people to whom he had sent tiger-claws, and wonderful inlaid boxes lined with sandal-wood, and cashmere shawls, and embroidered muslins, and all those treasures of Ind wherewith the

wanderer is wont to gratify his acquaintance : but that was all. Amongst all the men he knew there was only one to whose friendly smile and welcoming grasp of the hand he looked forward with any ray of real pleasure.

This was a man of about his own age, a comrade at Eton and Cambridge, a certain Frederick Hammersley, who had begun life as a country curate, and had been spoiled for the Church by the inheritance of a comfortable fortune, and the development of views in which his diocesan, a bishop of evangelical tendencies, had recognised a leaning towards Romanism.

Mr. Hammersley had not gone over to Rome, however ; he had contented himself with writing several theological pamphlets setting forth his principles, which were of the most advanced Anglican school, and with doing much good in his immediate neighbourhood. If he were no longer an accredited shepherd, he had not forgotten the divine precept, 'Feed my sheep.'

The last that Colonel Benyon had heard of this friend was the announcement of his marriage. They did not maintain friendship by an interchange of long letters, like a couple of school-girls. Each in

his way was fully occupied by the business of life ; and each felt secure of the other's friendship. There was no need of pen-and-ink protestations between men of this stamp.

Yes, there was some pleasure for the Colonel in the thought of meeting Fred Hammersley. He deposited his goods and chattels at the British, in Cockspur-street, and went straight to his friend's club, the respectable Athenæum. The London season was over, and passers-by stared a little at the Colonel's tall figure, with its unmistakable military air. There were some changes in the aspect of things even at this end of the town since those days before the Indian Mutiny, but the Colonel did not take the trouble to notice them ; the Corinthian pillars of a renovated club-house, or a new shop-front here and there, seemed trivial objects to a man fresh from the natural splendours of Cashmere ; or it may be that Herbert Benyon was uninterested in these things for lack of any personal association that went home to his heart. When he came to the Athenæum, where he had eaten many a pleasant dinner with his old friend, the familiar look of the hall stirred something in his breast that was almost emotion.

He was doomed to encounter a disappointment

here. 'Mr. Hammersley was abroad,' the porter told him, 'on the Continent.' The porter could not tell where; 'but he had been absent for a long time; ever since—ever since—last spring was a twelvemonth,' the porter said, pulling himself up, as if he had been about to say something else.

'And his letters,' asked the Colonel—'what becomes of them?'

'We don't get many,' answered the man; 'but any that do come here for him are sent to Coutts's. He's always on the move, they say, and nobody but his bankers knows where to find him.'

There was something in the man's face that impressed Colonel Benyon with the idea that he could say more, if he pleased. He lingered on the threshold of the strangers' room with a dubious meditative air, and slipped half a sovereign into the porter's hand, almost as if from pure absence of mind.

'Thank you, sir; you're very kind, sir. I'm sure I'm sorry enough Mr. Hammersley has left us. It was always a pleasure to do anything for him. Not that he ever gave any trouble—wanting hansoms fetched when it's raining cats and dogs, or anything of that kind. He was always quiet in his ways and affable in his manners. I wish there was more like

him. And it do seem a hard thing that he should have to turn his back upon his country like that.'

The Colonel stared at the speaker.

'But he travels for his own pleasure, I suppose?' he exclaimed. 'He had no particular reason for leaving England?'

'Well, yes, sir; there was unpleasant circumstances connected with his going away. Of course, at the West-end those things get talked of, and a person in my position can't shut his ears to such reports. I should be the last in the world to talk, but there's nothing going that don't come to my hearing somehow.'

Colonel Benyon stood aghast. What did it mean? Had Frederick Hammersley, that most conscientious and devoted of Anglicans, committed forgery? What was the meaning of this enforced exile? Then a light suddenly flashed on the Colonel's mind.

'His wife is with him, I suppose?' he said interrogatively.

'No, sir; Mrs. Hammersley is not with her husband. In fact, his going abroad arose from circumstances connected with that party. She turned out a bad lot, sir. I should be the last to speak disrespectuously of a lady, and of a lady connected with

ourselves, as I may say ; but I have heard our gentlemen say that Mrs. Hammersley's conduct was very bad.'

'She left him, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir ; ran away from him, after they'd been married little better than six months, with a gentleman they say she was engaged to before she kept company with Mr. Hammersley. The marriage was her father's doing, so I've heard ; and when this gentleman, who was a captain in the army, came home from India, she ran away with him. They went to Orstend and suchlike places together, and two months afterwards the captain was found dead early one September morning, shot through the heart, on the sands at Blankenburg. There was a great piece of work. Every one thought it was a duel, and that Mr. Hammersley had killed him ; but he was supposed to be in London at the time, no one had seen him or heard of him in Belgium, and they never tried to bring it home to him. The matter dropped after a little while. Mr. Hammersley got a divorce soon after, and left England directly his case was decided.'

'And what became of the lady?' asked the Colonel, curious to know the fate of a creature so lost.

'I've never heard, sir. She made no defence in the Divorce Court. It would go rather hard with her, I should think, the captain being dead, unless her friends took her back, which don't seem likely.'

'Poor wretch ! Do you remember the man's name ?'

'What, the captain, sir ? I've heard it times and often. He was a Junior-United gentleman. Let me see—was it Chandos ? No. Champney—Captain Champney.'

Colonel Benyon remembered the name, but not the man ; he was in a line regiment, altogether an obscure person compared with the dashing colonel of Bengal cavalry. He had not even heard of the scandal connected with the poor fellow's death. He had never been an eager devourer of English newspapers, unless they had some bearing on the politics of martial India ; so whatever mention there had been of Champney's death and Hammersley's divorce had escaped him.

He left the Athenæum and strolled into his own club, the Senior United Service, very much cast down. He ordered his dinner ; it was growing dusk by this time, and the coffee-room had an empty and even sepulchral look, with lamps glimmering here and

there in the twilight, like the religious gloom of some Egyptian temple. Modern architects have a knack of giving an air of Carthage or Babylon to their public dining-rooms.

After dinner the Colonel wrote to his old friend an honest straightforward epistle, touching lightly upon Frederick Hammersley's trouble, but withal full of manly sympathy; not such a flowery missive as the Orestes of a French novel would have addressed to his Pylades under the like circumstances, but a thorough English letter. If Hammersley were within any accessible distance, the Colonel proposed to join him as soon as he was strong enough for the journey.

'I am on leave for my health, and for that alone,' he wrote; 'and I do not see why I should not get well as fast, or perhaps faster abroad than I should in England. I have scarcely an association in this country that I care to renew. I am not even eager to visit that stern old Scottish barrack where you and I once hunted the Caledonian boar or stag, in an autumnal holiday, and which now belongs to me. In short, I have outlived most of the illusions of life, and have nothing left, save a belief in friendship where you are concerned. Let me come, my dear

Hammersley, unless solitude is your fixed humour ; but do not say yes if inclination says no.'

Colonel Benyon addressed this letter to his friend under cover to Messrs. Coutts ; and having done this, he felt almost as if he had no more to do until the wanderer's reply came. The waiters at the United Service told him that London was empty—in a fashionable sense, a veritable desert. Yet no doubt there were people he knew to be found in the great City, and there were theatres enough open for his amusement had he cared to visit them ; but he had lost his relish for the modern drama fifteen years before, so he went home to the British, read the papers, and drank the weakest decoction of soda-and-brandy until an hour or so after midnight.

He had a little business to transact with his army agent next day, and an interview with a stockbroker in Warnford-court, to whom he intrusted the investment of those moneys which had accumulated during his absence. On the day after, he made a round of calls at the houses of his old acquaintances ; and had reason to acknowledge the truth of the waiter's assertion as to the barrenness of civilised London. Every one best worth seeing was away. There were two or three business men, who professed themselves

the most miserable drudges in the great mill which is always grinding everything into money ; here and there in that obscurer region beyond Eaton-square he found a homely matron who lamented her inability to take the dear children to the seaside until Edwin or Augustus should be able to leave that tiresome office in the City, and who seemed unaffectedly rejoiced to see the Colonel ; but the choicer spirits among his old circle—the *dessus du panier*—were away yachting off Cowes, or gambling in Germany. Altogether the day was a dreary one. Colonel Benyon was glad to return to the solitude of his hotel and the intellectual refreshment of the evening papers. After this he idled away a week in revisiting such familiar haunts of his early manhood as he cared to see again. The contemplation of them gave him very little pleasure ; that one brief letter of Julia Dursay's seemed to have taken all the sunshine out of his nature. There was a settled bitterness in his mind—a sense that outside his profession there was nothing in the world worth living for.

Nearly a fortnight went by before there came any answer from Mr. Hammersley ; and the Colonel felt that he could shape no plan for his holiday till he received his friend's reply. The letter came at last—

a letter that went to Herbert Benyon's heart ; for it told him in a few words how dire a deathblow had shattered his friend's life.

'No, my dear Benyon,' wrote the exile, whose letter was dated from a small town in Norway ; 'you must not join me. The day may come, God only knows when, in which I may be fitter for a friend's companionship ; but at present I am too miserable a creature to inflict my society upon any one I care for. I have been roughing it in this country for the last six months, and like the fishing, the primitive life, and simple friendly people ; but I doubt if such an existence in such a climate as this would suit an Anglo-Indian valetudinarian, even supposing I were decent company. I write in all candour, you see, my dear Benyon, and I do not think you will doubt my regard for you because, under the bitter influence of an affliction which happily few men can measure, I shrink even from your companionship.

'And now I have a proposition to make to you. You are home on sick-leave, you tell me, and really in need of perfect rest. I have a house in the extreme west of Cornwall—a cottage in a garden of roses, within sight of the sea—which I think would suit you to a nicety, if I can persuade you to make

your home there for the next few months. The place is full of bitter associations for me, and I doubt if there is another living creature to whom I would offer it ; but I shall be heartily glad if you will inhabit a spot that was once very dear to me. The climate is almost equal to Madeira ; and if you have any inclination left for that kind of thing, there is plenty of shooting and hunting to be had in the neighbourhood. I have a couple of old servants in charge of the place, to whom I shall write by this post, telling them to hold themselves ready for your reception ; so you will have nothing to do but put yourself into the train at Paddington any morning you please, and go straight through to Penjudah, from which station a seven-mile drive will carry you to Trewardell, by which barbarous name my place is known. If you would drop a line to Andrew Johns, Trewardell, near Penjudah, beforehand, to announce your coming, he would meet you at the station with a dog-cart. There are a couple of good hacks in the stable, and a hunter I used to ride two years ago, which is, I fancy, about up to your weight.'

The offer was a tempting one, and after some hesitation the Colonel decided upon accepting it.

Cornwall was a new country to him—a remote semi-barbarous land, he fancied, still pervaded by the Phœnicians and King Arthur ; a land that had been more civilised two thousand years ago than to-day ; a land with which Solomon had had trading relations in the way of metal ; a land where, at some unknown period, the children of Israel had worked as slaves in the mines ; a land of which one might believe anything and everything, in fact. There was some smack of adventure in the idea of going to take possession of his absent friend's house, some faint flavour of romance in the whole business. It would be dull, of course ; but the Colonel liked solitude, and found himself year by year less inclined for the kind of life most people consider pleasant. He might have spent his autumn in half-a-dozen fine old country houses, and received unlimited petting from their fair inhabitants, if he had desired that kind of thing ; but he did not. He only wanted to recover his old health and vigour, and then to go back to India.

He wrote to Mr. Andrew Johns, informing that worthy of the probable time of his arrival ; and three days afterwards turned his back upon the great City, and sped away westwards across the fields, where the newly-cut stubble was still bright and yellow, onward

through a region where the land was red, then away skirting the edge of the bright blue water, across Isambard Brunel's wonderful bridge at Saltash, and then along a narrow line that flies over deep gorges in the woodland, through a fair and lonely landscape to the little station of Penjudah.

It was dusk in the late summer evening when the traveller heard the barbarous name of the place called out with the unfamiliar Cornish accent by a stalwart Cornish porter. The train, which had been about a quarter of a mile long when it left Paddington, had dwindled to a few carriages, and those were for the most part empty. Penjudah seemed the very end of the world. The perfect quiet of the place almost startled the Colonel as he stood upon the platform, looking round about him in the faint gray evening light. He found himself deep in the heart of a wooded valley, with no sign of human life within sight except the two officials who made up the staff of Penjudah station. There was a balmy odour of pines, and a subdued rustle of leaves lightly stirred by the warm west wind. Among the Indian hills he could scarcely remember a scene more lonely. A rabbit ran down a wooded bank and scudded across the line while he was looking about him. The guard

told him afterwards that scores of these vermin might be seen playing about the line at odd times. The trains were not frequent enough to scare them.

Outside the station the Colonel found an elderly man-servant, out of livery, with a smart dog-cart and a capital horse.

This was Andrew Johns. He handed the reins to the traveller, and took his seat behind in charge of Colonel Benyon's portmanteaus; and a few minutes afterwards the Colonel was driving up a hilly road that wound across the twilit woods. That seven miles' drive to Trewardell was all up and down hill. The Colonel had rarely encountered a stiffer road even in the East, but the landscape, dimly seen in that dubious light, seemed to him very beautiful; and he was glad that he had accepted his friend's offer. From the top of one of the hills he caught a glimpse of the distant sea; on the summit of another there was a stretch of common-land, and a tall obelisk that served as a beacon for all the countryside, a monumental tribute to a great Indian soldier.

Something over half an hour brought them into a valley, where there was a church with a square tower surmounted with stone pinnacles, a church of some pretension for a parish which consisted of about

half-a-dozen houses. Close to the church were the gates of Trewardell. They stood open to receive the stranger; and after a winding drive through a shrubbery, the Colonel saw the lighted windows of a long low white-walled cottage half smothered in foliage and flowers.

Mrs. Johns and a fat-faced housemaid were waiting in the hall, and a male hanger-on in corduroy and a stable-jacket was in attendance to receive the horse. Everything within looked bright and homelike; one might have fancied the house in full occupation. The hall was low and wide, with panelled walls painted white, and hung with water-coloured sketches prettily framed. The dining-room was a comfortable square apartment, with light oak furniture of the modern mediæval order, and dark-blue silk hangings. The drawing-room opened out of it, and was more of a boudoir or lady's morning-room than an actual drawing-room. Everywhere, in the dining-room, and even in the entrance-hall, there were books, from ponderous folios (choice editions on elephant-paper) to the daintiest duodecimos in white-vellum binding. There was a brightness and prettiness about everything which the Colonel never remembered to have noticed in any house before. It looked like a home

that had been made beautiful by the hands of a lover preparing a bower for his bride.

'A woman must have been hard to please who could not make herself happy here, and with so good a fellow as Fred Hammersley,' he said to himself.

An excellent dinner had been prepared for him, at which repast the versatile Mr. Johns waited, and proved himself an admirable butler. The Colonel asked him a good many questions about the neighbourhood in the course of the meal, to all of which Mr. Johns replied with considerable intelligence; but he uttered no word about his absent master, or of the kind of existence that he had led there in the brief period of his wedded life.

It was ten o'clock when Colonel Benyon had finished dinner, a warm moonlit night; so he went out to explore the gardens and enjoy his evening smoke. It might be very long before any feminine presence would lend its grace to those bright-looking rooms; but Herbert Benyon would as soon have thought of committing sacrilege as of desecrating his friend's house with the odour of tobacco. A woman had left the impress of her individuality upon everything. Those water-coloured sketches in the hall were signed by a woman's hand; in the drawing-room there were

caskets and writing-cases, work-baskets and photographic albums—innumerable trifles that were unmistakably a woman's belongings. It seemed as if everything had been religiously preserved exactly as the traitress had left it. Colonel Benyon could fancy her last look round this room, or fancied that he could fancy it. There was a low arm-chair on one side of the fireplace, with a gem of a work-table beside it—her seat, of course. How often had she sat there meditating treason, with her husband sitting opposite to her perhaps, watching her fondly all the while, and thanking God for having given him so sweet a wife!

‘Confound the woman!’ muttered the Colonel impatiently; ‘I can’t get her out of my mind.’

It did indeed seem to him to-night as if that false wife had left an evil influence upon the scene of her iniquity. He could not feel at ease in the house; he could not help wondering and speculating about that lost creature.

‘Where is she now?’ he asked himself; and then there arose before him an image of her sitting alone in some sordid continental lodging, poor, friendless, desolate; or worse, flaunting on a Parisian boulevard,

in the livery of sin. Do what he would, he could not help thinking of her.

'It will wear off in time, I suppose,' he said to himself; 'but upon my word, if I were her husband, I could scarcely worry myself more about her.'

He went out into the gardens, and roamed about amongst the flower-beds, and in the darksome shrubbery-paths, smoking and communing with himself for more than an hour. The grounds of Trewardell were spacious and lovely, quite out of proportion with the humble pretensions of the house. There was a lake on one side of the lawn, on the other a group of fine old plane-trees; beyond these a short avenue of elms leading to a meadow that looked almost a park. The soft night air was heavy with the perfume of myrtle and magnolia.

'The place is a perfect Eden,' said the Colonel; 'but I wish I had not been told the history of Eve and the Serpent.'

END OF VOL. II.

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